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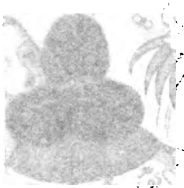

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PRANCING NIGGER

BY
RONALD FIRBANK

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
CARL VAN VECHTEN

NEW YORK
BRENTANO'S
PUBLISHERS

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AN ICING FOR A CHOCOLATE ÉCLAIR

I

RONALD FIRBANK visited Havana in August, 1922. The following month found him in the British West Indies where he wrote the first sketches of Prancing Nigger. He completed the book in Bordighera during the ensuing winter. I feel certain that this author's old friends will find the novel typical; new readers, on the other hand, may be assured that they could make the acquaintance of this strange figure in contemporary English letters in no more excellent manner. The tropical nights and dawns . . . how many brilliant passages they have evoked! . . . the trumpet-flowers and jasmines, the sapphire and emerald sea, the exotic birds, seem to have inspired him to write his best. There is possibly more beauty in this book than in any other by this author, and certainly no less humour.

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Firbank's treatment of the Negro is his own; he owes nothing, it may be said in advance, to such forerunners as Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe, Octavus Roy Cohen, E. K. Means, Waldo Frank, or T. S. Stribling. The Mouth family, whose social advances and amorous adventures form the woof of this tapestry, are as decorative and fantastic in their implications as Firbank's more familiar English duchesses. Perhaps, even, he moves a little more freely and easily in this, to him, esoteric milieu. It is not the first time, however, that Firbank has depicted the Negro (readers of Valmouth will recall the superb masseuse, Mrs. Yajña-valkya, and the eccentric Niri-Esther) but it is the first time that he has permitted the Negro to occupy the greater number of his always all too few pages.

The earthquake scene will, perhaps, be the favourite with most readers. Personally, I prefer the charity fête at the Villa Alba, or the tender episodes, enacted before imperishably telling décors, between Edna and Vittorio. But the whole book hovers delightfully between a Freudian dream and

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a drawing by Alastair, set to music by George Gershwin.

II

One hears a good deal, soon or late, about the "light touch" in literature. It might be believed, forsooth, that this was no rare quality, so frequently do reviewers apply this ready epithet to writing which has no touch at all. Speaking for myself, I may say that I have discovered only one authentic master of the light touch, a man who might be writing with his eyelashes or the tips of his polished finger-nails. Precisely, if diagrams are called for, this man is Ronald Firbank. His touch is so light, indeed, that after reading one of his books, I find even Max Beerbohm a trifle studied, a little composed. Confronted by Prancing Nigger, Aldous Huxley might almost be regarded as an earnest fellow.

Firbank has had, since I first called attention to his entertainments in April, 1922, his admiring readers, but they have been few and special. It is my hope that this

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initial appearance in America of a new book from his pen will give him a somewhat wider audience. Still, I cannot forget that I meet ladies in the street who batter me with their parasols because they have been led to read his books through reading encomiastic articles of mine. I quite appreciate the depth of their feeling, but when these ladies assure me that they do not like Firbank, I am learning more about the ladies themselves than I am about the object of their abomination.

He is, perhaps, the only purely Greek writer that we possess today. There is no sentimentality or irony in his work; hardly even cynicism. There is, indeed, a baffling quality about Firbank's very lucidity, his gay, firm grasp of his trivial peccancies. His ellipses serve the same purpose as the descending curtain at the close of the first tableau of Die Walküre. To such affairs of the world as those for which he has no taste he is utterly indifferent. He does not satirize the things he hates. He flits airily about, arranging with skilful fingers the things he loves. Make no mistake: what he

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wants to do, he does, and is a master of the doing of. The delicate tranquillity of his prose, shot through with icy stabs of wit and shimmering gleams of sophistication, is very rare and very original. When you compare him with other authors, logically you can go no further than the binding. His utterly own manner alienates him completely from the possibility of any other form of estimate. He is unique, a glittering dragon-fly skimming over the sunlit literary garden, where almost all the other creatures crawl.

III

Arthur Annesley Ronald Firbank, the second and only surviving son of the late Major Sir (Joseph) Thomas Firbank, M.P., and Jane Harriette, daughter of the late Reverend James Perkins Garret of Kilgarron County, Carlow, was born in London in 1886. He was educated " abroad " and at Trinity College, Cambridge. He still travels extensively. Last summer found him in Spain and Portugal; this winter finds him in Rome.

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Elkin Mathews issued Firbank's first book, Odette d'Antrevernes, in 1905. This slender volume of forty-five pages, bound in grey wrappers, stamped in gold, also contains A Study in Temperament, suggestive in style of his later work. Of Odette there was also a tall paper edition, limited to *ten copies,* bound in vellum, from which A Study in Temperament was omitted. This story was also excluded from Grant Richards's reprint of Odette (wrappers) in 1916. Firbank's other books, all published by Richards, are: Vainglory (1915), Inclinations (1916), Caprice (1917), Valmouth (1919), The Princess Zoubaroff (a comedy in three acts; 1920), Santal (wrappers; 1921), and The Flower Beneath the Foot (1923). These volumes are embellished with designs by Félicien Rops, Albert Ruthers-ton, Augustus John, Michel Sevier, Albert Buhrer, C. R. W. Nevinson, and Wyndham Lewis.

Firbank's portrait has been painted by Charles Shannon, by Wyndham Lewis, by Augustus John (several times), and by the Spaniard, Guevara, a representation which

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he describes as "a perfectly brutal little study of me, huddled up in a black suit by a jar of orchids, in a décor suggestive of opium."

In conclusion I may permit myself to bring forward a short passage from Vainglory in which Firbank, writing ostensibly of Harvester's Vaindreams, sums, perhaps, himself up:

"'He has such a strange, peculiar style. His work calls to mind a frieze with figures of varying heights trotting all the same way. If one should by chance turn about it's usually merely to stare or to sneer or to make a grimace. Only occasionally his figures care to beckon. And they seldom really touch.'

"'He's too cold. Too classic, I suppose.'

"'Classic! In the Encyclopedia Britannica his style is described as *odd spelling, brilliant, and vicious.*'"

CARL VAN VECHTEN

New York
January 23, 1924

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PRANCING NIGGER

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PRANCING NIGGER

I

LOOKING gloriously bored, Miss Miami Mouth gaped up into the boughs of a giant silk-cotton tree. In the lethargic noontide nothing stirred: all was so still, indeed, that the sound of someone snoring was clearly audible among the cane-fields far away.

"After dose yams an' pods an' de white falernum, I dats way sleepy too," she murmured, fixing heavy, somnolent, eyes upon the prospect that lay before her.

Through the sun-tinged greenery shone the sea, like a floor of silver glass strewn with white sails.

Somewhere out there, fishing, must be her boy, Bamboo!

And, inconsequently, her thoughts wandered from the numerous shark-casualties of late to the mundane proclivities of her mother; for to quit the little village of

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Mediavilla for the capital was that dame's fixed obsession.

Leave Mediavilla, leave Bamboo! The young negress fetched a sigh.

In what, she reflected, way would the family gain by *entering society*, and how did one enter it, at all? There would be a gathering, doubtless, of the elect (probably armed), since the best society is exclusive, and difficult to enter. And, then? Did one burrow? Or charge? She had sometimes heard it said that people "pushed" . . . and closing her eyes, Miss Miami Mouth sought to picture her parents, assisted by her small sister, Edna, and her brother, Charlie, forcing their way, perspiring, but triumphant, into the highest social circles of the city of Cuna-Cuna.

Across the dark Savannah country the city lay, one of the chief alluring cities of the world: The Celestial city of Cuna-Cuna, Cuna, city of Mimosa, Cuna, city of Arches, Queen of the Tropics, Paradise — almost invariably travellers referred to it like that.

Oh, everything must be fantastic there, where even the very pickneys put on clothes!

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ERRATA

PAGE	LINE			
5	7	delete " and smiling up into the blue absolute of the sky "		
12	24	" Hey-do-day "	should read	" Hey-ho-day "
14	24	" S'cieyt "	" "	" S'ciety "
20	11	" Mediaville "	" "	" Mediavilla "
21	17	" of "	" "	" ob "
27	9	delete " out ob de pulpit "		
		" skangle "	should read	" scandal "
37	5	hyphen after " savannah " should be period		
37	28	" at's "	should read	" dat's "
38	15	" Miami "	" "	" Mimi "
54	4	" glancing "	" "	" glance "
72	22	" amazingly "	" "	" incredibly "
84	20	" bwam-wams "	" "	" bwam-wam bwam-wams "
85	9	" Marthe Regnier's Season " should read " Clara Novotny and Lily Lima's Season "		
96	7	" Dalow "	should read	" Dalou "
100	5	" and "	" "	" an' "
105	24	" footman's "	" "	" footmen's "
107	22	" volcanic "	" "	" seismic "
110	26	" soothe "	" "	" appease "
111	10	" easing a little napkin " should read " easing a little the napkin "		
112	17	" Edna was doubtless sipping champagne! " should read " Doubt-		

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And Miss Miami Mouth glanced fondly down at her own plump little person, nude, but for a girdle of creepers that she would gather freshly twice a day.

"It would be a shame, sh'o, to cover it," she murmured drowsily, caressing her body, and smiling up into the blue absolute of the sky, and moved to a sudden spasm of laughter, she tittered: "No! really. De ideah!"

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II

SILVER bean-stalks, silver bean-stalks, oh hé, oh hé," down the long village street, from door to door, the cry repeatedly came, until the vendor's voice was lost on the evening air.

In a rocking chair, before the threshold of a palm thatched cabin, a matron with broad, bland features, and a big, untidy figure, surveyed the scene with a nonchalant eye.

Beneath some tall trees, bearing flowers like flaming bells, a few staid villagers sat enjoying the rosy dusk, while, strolling towards the sea, two young men passed by with fingers intermingled.

With a slight shrug, the lady plied her fan.

As the Mother of a pair of oncoming girls, the number of ineligible young men, or confirmed *bachelors* around the neighbourhood was a constant source of irritation. . . .

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"Sh'o, dis remoteness bore an' weary me to death," she exclaimed, addressing someone through the window behind; and receiving no audible answer, she presently rose, and went within.

It was the hour when, fortified by a siesta, Mrs. Ahmadou Mouth was wont to approach her husband on general household affairs, and to discuss, in particular, the question of their removal to the town; for, with the celebration of their Pearl-wedding, close at hand, the opportunity to make the announcement of a change of residence to their guests, ought not, she believed, to be missed.

"We leave Mediavilla for de education ob my daughters," she would say; or, perhaps: "We go to Cuna-Cuna, for de finishing ob *mes filles!*"

But, unfortunately, the reluctance of Mr. Mouth to forsake his Home, seemed to increase from day to day.

She found him asleep, bolt upright, his head gently nodding, beneath a straw-hat beautifully browned.

"Say, nigger, lub," she murmured,

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brushing her hand featheringly along his knee, " say, nigger, lub, I gotta go! "

It was the tender prelude to the storm.

Evasive, (and but half-awake), he warned her. " Let me alone; Ah'm thinkin'."

" Prancing nigger, now come on! "

" Ah'm thinkin'."

" Tell me what for dis procrastination? " Exasperated, she gripped his arm.

But for all reply, Mr. Mouth drew a volume of revival hymns towards him, and turned on his wife his back.

" You ought to shame o' you-self, sh'o," she caustically commented, crossing to the window.

The wafted odours of the cotton trees without, oppressed the air. In the deepening twilight, the rising moonmist, already obscured the street.

" Dis place not healthy. Dat damp! Should my daughters go off into a decline . . ." she apprehensively murmured, as her husband started softly to sing.

" For ebber wid de Lord!
Amen; so let it be
Life from de dead is in dat word
'Tis immortality."

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"If it's de meeting-house dats de obstruction, dair are odders, too, in Cuna-Cuna," she observed.

"How often hab I bid you nebba to mention dat modern Sodom in de hearing ob my presence!"

"De Debil frequent de village, fo' dat matter, besides de town."

"Sh'o nuff."

"But yestiddy, dat po' silly negress Ottalie was seduced again in a Mango track — ; an' dats de third time!"

"Heah in de body pent,
Absent from Him I roam
Yet nightly pitch my movin' tent
A day's march nearer home."

"Prancing nigger, from dis indifference to your fambly, be careful lest you do arouse de vials ob de Lord's wrath!"

"Yet nightly pitch — " he was beginning again, in a more subdued key, but the tones of his wife arrested him.

"Prancing Nigger, lemme say sumptin' more!" Mrs. Mouth took a long sighing breath: "In dis dark jungle my lil jewel Edna, I feah, will wilt away. . . ."

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"Wh'a gib you cause to speak like dat?"

"I was tellin' my fortune lately wid de cards," she reticently made reply, insinuating, by her half-turned eyes, that more disclosures of an ominous nature concerning others besides her daughter had been revealed to her as well.

"Lordey Lord; what is it den you want?"

"I want a Villa with a watercloset —" flinging wiles to the winds, it was a cry from the heart.

"De Lord hab pity on dese vanities an' innovations!"

"In town, you must rememba, often de houses are far away from de parks; — de city, in dat respect, not like heah."

"Say nothin' more! De widow ob my po' brudder Willie, across de glen, she warn me I ought nebba to listen to you."

"Who care for a common woman, dat only read de 'Negro World,' an' nebba see anyt'ing else!" she swelled.

Mr. Mouth turned conciliatingly.

"To-morrow, me arrange for de victuals for our ebenin' at Home!"

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"Good, bery fine," she murmured, acknowledging through the window the cordial "good-night" of a few late labourers, returning from the fields, each with a bundle of sugar-cane poised upon the head.

"As soon as marnin' dawn me take dis bizniz in hand."

"Only pramas, nigger darlin'," she cajoled, "dat durin' de course ob de reception, you make a lil speech to inform de neighbours ob our gwine away bery soon, for de sake of de education ob our girls."

"Ah cyan pramas nothing'."

"I could do wid a change too, honey, after my last miscarriage."

"Change come wid our dissolution," he assured her, "quite soon enuff!"

"Bah," she murmured, rubbing her cheek to his: "we set out on our journey sh'o in de season ob Novemba."

To which with asperity he replied: "*Not for two Revolutions!*" and rising brusquely, strode solemnly from the room.

"Hey-do-day," she yawned, starting a wheezy gramophone, and sinking down upon his empty chair; and she was lost in

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ball-room fancies, (whirling in the arms of some blonde young foreigner), when she caught sight of her daughter's reflection in the glass.

Having broken, or discarded her girdle of leaves, Miss Miami Mouth, attracted by the gramophone, appeared to be teaching a hectic two-step to the cat.

"Fie, fie, my lass. Why you be so *Indian?*" her mother exclaimed, bestowing with the full force of a carpet-slipper, a well-aimed spank from behind.

"*Aïe, aïe!*"

"Sh'o: you nohow select!"

"*Aïe. . . .*"

"De low exhibition!"

"I had to take off my apron, 'cos it seemed to draw de bees," Miami tearfully explained, catching up the cat in her arms.

"Ob course, if you choose to wear roses. . . ."

"It was but ivy!"

"De berries ob de ivy, entice de same," Mrs. Mouth replied, nodding graciously, from the window, to Papy Paul, the next door neighbour, who appeared to be taking

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a lonely stroll with a lanthorn and a pine-apple.

" I dats way wondering why Bamboo, no pass, dis ebenin', too; as a rule, it is seldom he stop so late out upon de sea," the young girl ventured.

" After I shall introduce you to de world, (de advantage ob a good marriage; when I t'ink ob mine!), you will be ashamed, sh'o, to recall dis infatuation."

" De young men ob Cuna-Cuna, (tell me, Mammee), are dey den so nice?"

" Ah, Chile! If I was your age again . . ."

" Sh'o, dair's nothin' so much in dat."

" As a young girl of eight, (Tee-hee!) I was distracting to all the gentlemen," Mrs. Mouth asserted, confiding a smile to a small, long-billed bird, in a cage, of the variety known as Bequia-Sweet.

" How I wish I'd been born, like you, in August-Town, across de Isthmus!"

" It gib me dis taste fo' S'ciety, Chile."

" In S'cieyt, don't dey dress wid clothes on ebery day?"

" Sh'o; surtainly."

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"An' don't dey nebba tickle?"

"In August-Town, de aristocracy conceal de best part ob deir bodies; not like heah!"

"An' tell me, Mammee . . . ? De first lover you eber had . . . was he half as handsome as Bamboo?"

"De first dude, Chile, I eber had, was a lil, lil buoy, . . . wid no hair (whatsoeber at all,) bal' like a calabash!" Mrs. Mouth replied, as her daughter Edna entered with the lamp.

"Frtt!" the wild thing tittered, setting it down with a bang: with her cincture of leaves and flowers, she had the éclat of a butterfly.

"Better fetch de shade," Mrs. Mouth exclaimed, staring squeamishly at Miami's shadow on the wall.

"Already it grow dark; no one about now at dis hour ob night at all."

"Except thieves an' ghouls," Mrs. Mouth replied, her glance straying towards the window.

But only the little blue winged Bats were passing beneath a fairyland of stars.

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"When I do dis, or dis, my shadow appear as formed as Mimi's!"

"Sh'o, Edna, she dat provocative today."

"Be off at once Chile, an' lay de table for de ebenin' meal; an' be careful not to knock de shine off de new tin-teacups," Mrs. Mouth commanded, taking up an Estate-Agent's catalogue, and seating herself comfortably beneath the lamp.

"'City of Cuna-Cuna,'" she read, "'*in the Heart of a Brainy District,* (within easy reach of University, shops, etc.) A charming, Freehold Villa. Main drainage. Extensive views. Electric light. Every convenience.'"

"Dat sound just de sort ob lil shack for me."

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III

THE strange sadness of evening, the détresse of the Evening Sky! Cry, cry white Rain Birds out of the West, cry . . . !

"An' so, Miami, you no come back no more?"

"No, no come back."

Flaunting her boredom by the edge of the sea one close of day, she had chanced to fall in with Bamboo, who, stretched at length upon the beach, was engaged in mending a broken net.

"An' I dats way glad," she half-resentfully pouted, jealous a little of his toil.

But, presuming deafness, the young man laboured on, since, to support an aged mother, and to attain one's desires, perforce necessitates work; and his fondest wish, by dint of saving, was to wear on his wedding-day a pink starched cotton shirt — a starched, pink cotton shirt, stiff as a boat's-sail when the North winds caught it!

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But a pink shirt would mean trousers . . . and trousers would lead to shoes . . . "Extravagant nigger, don't you dare!" he would exclaim, in dizzy panic, from time to time, aloud.

"Forgib me, honey," he begged, "but me obliged to finish, while de daylight last."

"Sh'o," she sulked, following the amazing strategy of the sunset-clouds.

"Miami angel you look so sweet: I dat amorous ob you, Mimi!"

A light laugh tripped over her lips:

"Say buoy, how you getting on?" she queried, sinking down on her knees beside him.

"I dat amorous ob you!"

"Oh, ki," she tittered, with a swift mocking glance at his crimson loincloth. She had often longed to snatch it away.

"Say you lub me, just a lil, too, deah?"

"Sh'o," she answered softly, sliding over on to her stomach, and laying her cheek to the flats of her hands.

Boats with crimson spouts, to wit, steamers, dotted the skyline far away, and barques, with sails like the wings of butter-

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flies, borne by an idle breeze, were bringing more than one ineligible young mariner, back to the prose of shore.

"Ob wha' you t'inking?"

"Nothin', she sighed, contemplating laconically a little transparent shell of violet pearl, full of sea-water and grains of sand, that the wind ruffled as it blew.

"Not ob *any* sort ob lil t'ing?" he caressingly insisted, breaking an open dark flower from her belt of wild Pansy.

"I should be gwine home," she breathed, recollecting the undoing of the negress Ottalie.

"Oh, I dat amorous ob you, Mimi."

"If you want to finish dat net, while de daylight last."

For oceanward, in a glowing ball, the sun had dropped already.

"Sh'o, nigger, I only wish to be kind," she murmured, getting up, and sauntering a few paces along the strand.

Lured, perhaps, by the nocturnal phosphorescence from its lair, a water-scorpion, disquieted at her approach, turned and vanished amid the sheltering cover of the

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rocks. "Isht, isht," she squealed, wading after it into the surf; but to find it, look as she would, was impossible. Dark, curious and anxious, in the fast failing light, the sea disquieted her too, and it was consoling to hear close behind her, the solicitous voice of Bamboo.

"Us had best soon be movin', befo' de murk ob night."

The few thatched cabins, that comprised the village of Mediaville, lay not half-a-mile from the shore. Situated between the savannah and the sea, on the southern side of the island known as Tacarigua, (the "burning Tacarigua" of the Poets), its inhabitants were obliged, from lack of communication with the larger island centres, to rely to a considerable extent for a livelihood among themselves. Local market-days, held, alternatively, at Valley Village, or Broken Hill (the nearest approach to industrial towns in the district around Mediavilla, were the chief source of rural trade, when such merchandise as fish, coral, beads, bananas and loincloths, would ex-

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change hands amid much animation, social gossip and pleasant fun.

"Wh'a you say to dis?" she queried, as they turned inland through the cane-fields, holding up a fetish known as a "luck-ball," attached to her throat by a chain.

"Who gib it you?" he shortly demanded, with a quick suspicious glance.

"Mammee, she bring it from Valley Village, an' she bring another for my lil sister, too."

"Folks say she attend de Market only to meet de Obi man, who cast a spell so dat your Dada move to Cuna-Cuna."

"Dat so!"

"Your Mammee no seek ebber de influence of Obeah?"

"Not dat I know ob!" she replied; nevertheless, she could not but recall her mother's peculiar behaviour of late, especially upon Market days, when instead of conversing with her friends, she would take herself off, with a mysterious air, saying she was going to the Baptist Chapel.

"Mammee, she hab no faith in de Witch-Doctor, at all," she murmured, halting to

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lend an ear to the liquid note of a Pea-dove among the canes.

"I no care; me follow after wherebber you go," he said, stealing an arm about her.

"True?" she breathed, looking up languidly towards the white mounting moon.

"I dat amorous ob you, Mimi."

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IV

IT WAS the Feast night. In the grey spleen of evening through the dusty lanes towards Mediavilla, county-society flocked.

Peering round a cow-shed door, Primrose and Phoebe, procured as waitresses for the occasion, felt their valour ooze as they surveyed the arriving guests, and dropping prostrate amid the straw declared, in each others arms, that never, never would they find the courage to appear.

In the road, before a tall tamarind tree, a well-spread supper board exhaled a pungent odour of fried cascadura fish, exciting the plaintive ravings of the wan pariah dogs, and the cries of a few little stark naked children engaged as guardians to keep them away. Defying an ancient and inelegant custom, by which the hosts welcomed their guests by the side of the road, Mrs. Mouth had elected to remain within the precincts of the house, where, according

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to tradition, the bridal trophies, cowrie-shells, feathers, and a bouquet of faded orange blossom,— were being displayed.

"It seem no more dan yestidday," she was holding forth gaily over a goblet of Sangaree wine, "it seem no more dan yestidday dat I put on me maiden wreath ob arange blastams to walk wid me nigger to church."

Clad in rich-hued creepers, she was both looking and feeling her best.

"Sh'o," a woman with blonde-dyed hair and Buddery eyes exclaimed, "it seem no more dan just like yestidday; dat not so, Papy Paul?" she queried, turning to an old man in a raspberry-pink kerchief, who displayed, (as he sat) more of his person than he seemed to be aware of.

But Papy Paul was confiding a receipt for pickling yuccas to Mamma Luna, the mother of Bamboo, and made as if not to hear.

Offering a light, lilac wine, sweet and heady, Miami circled, here and there. She had a cincture of white rose-oleanders, and

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a bandeau of blue convolvoli. She held a fan.

"Or do you care for anyt'ing else?" she was enquiring, automatically, of Mr. Musket, (the Father of three very common girls), as a melodious tinkle of strings announced the advent of the minstrels from Broken Hill.

Following the exodus roadward, it was agreeable to reach the outer air.

Under the high trees by the yard-door gate, the array of vehicles and browsing quadrupeds, was almost as numerous as upon a market-day. Coming and going between the little Café of the "Forty Parrots" (with its Bar, spelled *Biar* in twinkling lights), the quiet village road was agog, with bustling folk, as perhaps never before. All iris in the dusk, a few loosely-loin-clothed young men, had commenced dancing aloofly among themselves, bringing down some light (if bitter) banter, from the belles.

Pirouetting with these, Miami recognized the twinkling feet of her brother Charlie, a lad who preferred roaming the wide savan-

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nah country after butterflies with his net, to the ever increasing etiquette of his home.

"Sh'o, S'ciety no longer what it wa'," the mother of two spare lean girls, like young giraffes, was lamenting, when a clamorous gong summoned the assembly to the festal board.

In the glow of blazing palm logs, stoked by capering pickneys, the company, with some considerable jostling, became seated by degrees.

"Fo' what we gwine to recebe, de Lord make us to be truly t'ankful," Mr. Mouth's low voice was lost amid the din. Bending to the decree of Providence, and trusting in God for the welfare of his house, he was resigned to follow the call of duty, by allowing his offspring such educational advantages and worldly polish, that only a city can give.

"An' so I heah you gwine to leab us!" the lady at his elbow exclaimed, helping herself to a claw of a crab.

"Fo' de sake ob de chillens schoolin'," Mr. Mouth made reply, blinking at the brisk lightning play through the foliage of the trees.

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"Dey tell me de amount of licence dat go on ober dah," she murmured, indicating with her claw the chequered horizon, "but de whole world needs revising, as de Missionary truly say!"

"Indeed, an' dats de trute."

"It made me cry," a plump little woman declared, "when de Minister speak so serious, out ob de pulpit, on de skangle ob close dancing. . . ."

"Fo' one t'ing lead sh'o to de nex'!" Mr. Mouth obstrusely assented, turning his attention upon an old negress answering to the name of Mamma May, who was retailing how she had obtained the sunshade, beneath which, since noon, she had walked all the way to the party.

"Ah could not afford a parasol, so Ah just cut miself a l'il green bush, an' held it up ober my head," she was crooning in gleeful triumph.

"It's a wonder, indeed, no one gib you a lif'!" several voices observed, but the discussion was drowned by an esoteric song of remote, tribal times, from the lips of Papy Paul.

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"I am King Elephant-bag,
Ob de rose-pink Mountains!
Tatou, tatouay, tatou. . . ."

provoking a giggle from Miss Stella Spooner, the marvellous daughter of an elderly father, and, in which, she was joined, by the youngest Miss Mouth.

Incontestably a budding Princess, the playful mite was enjoying, with airy nonchalance, her initial experience of Society.

"Ob course she is very *jeune,*" Mrs. Mouth murmured archly, behind her hand, into the ear of Mr. Musket.

"It's de Lord's will," he cautiously replied, rolling a mystified eye towards his wife, (a sable negress out of Africa), continually vaunting her foreign extraction: "I'm Irish," she would say: "I'm Irish, deah. . . ."

"Sh'o she de born image ob her elder sister!"

"De world all say she to marry de son ob ole Mamma Luna, dat keep de lil shop."

"Suz! Wha' nex'?" Mrs. Mouth returned, breaking off to focus Papy Paul, apparently, already, far from sober: "I

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hav' saw God, an' I hav' spoke wid de President, too!" he was announcing impressively to Mamma Luna, a little old woman in whose veins ran the blood of many races.

"Dair's no trute at all in *dat* report," Mrs. Mouth quietly added, signalling direction to a sturdy, round-bottomed little lad, who had undertaken to fill the gap caused by Primrose and Phoebe.

Bearing a panier piled with fruit, he had not got far before the minstrels called forth several couples to their feet.

The latest jazz, bewildering, glittering, exuberant as the soil, a jazz, throbbing, pulsating, with a zim, zim, zim, a jazz all abandon and verve that had drifted over the glowing savannah and the waving canefields from Cuna-Cuna by the Violet Sea, invited, irresistibly, to motion, every boy and girl.

"Prancing nigger, hab a dance?" his wife, transported, shrilled: but Mr. Mouth was predicting a Banana slump, to Mrs. Walker, the local midwife, and paid no heed.

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Torso-to-torso, the youngsters twirled, while even a pair of majestic matrons, Mrs. Friendship and Mrs. Mother, went whirling away, (together), into the brave summer dusk. Accepting the invitation of Bamboo, Miami rose, but before dancing long complained of the heat.

"Sh'o, it cooler in de Plantation," he suggested, pointing along the road.

"Oh, I too much afraid!"

"What for you afraid?"

But Miami only laughed, and tossed her hand as if she were scattering dewdrops.

Following the roving fireflies, and the adventurous flittermice, they strolled along in silence. By the roadside, two young men, friends, walking with fingers intermingled, saluted them softly. An admirable evening for a promenade! Indescribably sweet, the floating field-scents, enticed them witchingly on.

"Shi!" she exclaimed as a bird skimmed swiftly past with a chattering cry.

"It noddin', deah, but a lil wee owl!"

"An' it to make my heart go so," she murmured, with a side-long smiling glance.

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He had a new crimson loincloth, and a blood pink carnation at his ear.

"What for you afraid?" he tenderly pressed.

"It much cooler heah, doh it still very hot," she inconsequently answered, pausing to listen to the fretting of the hammer-tree-frogs in the dusk.

"Dey hold a concert honey lub, all for us."

Rig a jig jig, rig a jig jig. . . .

"Just hark to de noise!" she murmured, starting a little at the silver lightning behind the palms.

"Just hark," he repeated, troubled.

Rig a jig jig, rig a jig jig. . . .

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V

LITTLE jingley trot-trot-trot, over the Savannah, hey — !

Joggling along towards Cuna-Cuna the creaking caravan shaped its course. Seated in a hooded chariot, berced by mule-bells, and nibbling a shoot of ripe cane, Mrs. Mouth appeared to have attained the heights of bliss. Disregarding, or insensitive to her husband's incessant groans, (wedged in between a case of pineapples, and a box marked " lingerie "), she abandoned herself voluptuously to her thoughts. It was droll to contemplate meeting an old acquaintance, Nini Snagg, who had gone to reside in Cuna-Cuna long ago: " Fancy seein' you! " she would say, and how they both would laugh.

Replying tersely to the innumerable " what would you do ifs " of her sister, supposing attacks from masked-bandits or ferocious wild-animals, Miami moped.

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All her whole heart yearned back behind her and never had she loved Bamboo so much as now.

"— if a big, shaggy buffalo, wid two, sharp, horns, dat long, were to rush right at you?" Edna was plaguing her, when a sudden jolt of the van set up a loud cackling from a dozen scared cocks and hens.

"Drat dose fowl; as if dair were none in Cuna-Cuna!" Mrs. Mouth addressed her husband.

"Not birds ob dat brood," he retorted, plaintively starting to sing.

"I t'ink when I read dat sweet story ob old,
When Jesus was here among men,
How He called lil chillens as lambs to His fold,
I should hab like to hab been wid dem den!
I wish dat His hands had been placed ahn my head,
Dat His arms had been thrown aroun' me,
An' dat I might hab seen His kind look when He said,
Let de lil ones come unto Me!"

"Mind de dress-basket, don't drop down, deah, an' spoil our clo'," Mrs. Mouth exclaimed, indicating a cowskin trunk that

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seemed to be in peril of falling; for, from motives of economy and ease, it had been decided that, not before Cuna-Cuna should rear her queenly towers above them, would they change their floral garlands for the more artificial fabrics of the town, and, when Edna, vastly to her importance, should go into a pair of frilled "invisibles" and a petticoat for the first amazing time; nor, indeed, would Mr. Mouth himself take "to de pants," until his wife and daughters should have assumed their skirts. But this, from the languid pace at which their vehicle proceeded, was unlikely to be just yet. In the torrid tropic noontime, haste however was quite out of the question. Bordered by hills, long, yellow and low, the wooded savannah rolled away beneath a blaze of trembling heat.

"I don't t'ink much ob dis part of de country," Mrs. Mouth commented. "All dese common palms . . . de cedar wood tree, dat my tree. Dat is de timber I prefer."

"An' some," Edna pertly smiled, "dey like best de bamboo. . . ."

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A remark that was rewarded by a blow on the ear.

"Now she set up a hullabaloo like de time de scorpion bit her botty," Mrs. Mouth lamented, and, indeed, the uproar made, alarmed from the boskage a cloud of winsome soldier-birds and inquisitive parroquets.

"Oh my God," Mr. Mouth exclaimed. "What for you make all dat dere noise?" But his daughter paid no attention, and soon sobbed herself to sleep.

Advancing through tracks of acacia-scrub, or groves of nutmeg-trees, they jolted along in the gay, exalting sunlight. Flowers brighter than love wafting the odour of spices, strewed in profusion the long guinea-grass on either side of the way.

"All dose sweet aprons, if it weren't fo' de flies!" Mrs. Mouth murmured, regarding some heavy, ambered, Trumpet flowers, with a covetous eye.

"I trust Charlie get bit by no snake!"

"Prancing Nigger! It a lil too late now to t'ink ob dat."

Since to avoid overcrowding the family

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party, Charlie was to follow with his butterfly net, and arrive as he could. And never were butterflies, (seen in nigger-boys dreams) as brilliant, or frolicsome, as were those of mid-savannah-Azure Soledads, and radiant Conquistadors with frail flamboyant wings, wove about the labouring mules perpetual fresh rosettes.

"De Lord protect de lad," Mr. Mouth remarked, relapsing into silence.

Onward through the cloudless noontide, beneath the ardent sun, the caravan, drowsily crawled. As the afternoon advanced, Mrs. Mouth produced a pack of well thumbed cards, and cutting, casually, twice, began interrogating Destiny with these. Reposing as best she might, Miami gave herself up to her reflections. The familiar aspect of the wayside palms, the tattered pennons of the bananas, the big silk-cottons, (known, to children, as 'Mammee-trees'), all brought to her mind Bamboo.

"Dair's somet'in' dat look like a death dah, at's troublin' me," Mrs. Mouth remarked, moodily fingering a greasy ace.

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"De Almighty forgib dese foolish games!" Mr. Mouth protestingly said.

"An' from de lie ob de cards . . . it seem as ef de corpse were ob de masculine species."

"Wha' gib you de notion ob dat?"

"Sh'o, a sheep puts his wool on his favourite places," Mrs. Mouth returned, reshuffling slowly her pack.

Awakened by her Father's psalms, Edna's "What would you do's" had commenced with volubility anew, growing more eerie with the gathering night.

". . . if a Wood-Sprit wid two heads an' six arms, were to take hold ob you, Miami, from behind?"

"I no do nothin' at all," Miami answered briefly.

"Talk not so much ob de jumbies, chile, as de chickens go to roost!" Mrs. Mouth admonished.

"Or, if de debil himself should?" Edna insisted, allowing Snowball, the cat, to climb on to her knee.

"Nothin', sh'o," Miami murmured, regarding dreamily the sun's sinking disk,

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that was illuminating all the Western sky with incarnadine and flamingo-rose. Ominous in the falling dusk, the savannah rolled away, its radiant hues effaced beneath a rapid tide of deepening shadow.

"Start de gramophone gwine girls, an' gib us somet'in' bright!" Mrs. Mouth exclaimed, depressed by the forlorn note of the Twa-oo-Twa-oo bird, that mingled its lament with a thousand night cries from the grass.

"When de saucy female sing: 'My Ice Cream Girl,' fo' sh'o she scare de elves."

And as though by force of magic, the nasal soprano of an invisible songstress rattled forth with tinkling gusto a music-hall air with a sparkling refrain.

"And the boys shout Girlie, hi!
Bring me soda, soda, soda,
(Aside, spoken) (Stop your fooling there and let me alone!)
For I'm an Ice Cream Soda Girl."

"It put me in mind ob de last sugar-factory explosion! It was de same day dat

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Snowball crack de Tezzrazine record. Drat de cat."

"O, Lordey Lord! Wha' for you make dat din?" Mr. Mouth complained, knotting a cotton handkerchief over his head.

"I hope you not gwine to be billeous honey, afore we get to Lucia?"

"Lemme alone. Ah'm thinkin'. . . ."

Pressing on by the light of a large clear moon, the hamlet of Lucia, the halting-place proposed for the night, lay still far ahead.

Stars, like many Indian pinks, flecked with pale brightness the sky above; towards the horizon shone the Southern Cross, while the Pole Star, through the palm-fronds, came and went.

"And the men cry Girlie, hi!
Bring me—

"Silence, dah! Ah'm thinkin' . . ."

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VI

CUNA, full of charming roses, full of violet shadows, full of music, full of Love, Cuna . . . !

Leaning from a balcony of the Grand Savannah hotel, their instincts all aroused, Miami and Edna gazed out across the Alemeda, a place all foliage, lamplight, and flowers. It was the hour when Society, in slowly-parading carriages, would congregate to take the air beneath the pale mimosas that adorned the favourite promenade. All but recumbent, as though agreeably fatigued by their recent emotions, (what wild follies were not committed in shuttered-villas during the throbbing hours of noon?) the Cunans, in their elegant equipages, made for anyone, fresh from the provinces, an interesting and absorbing sight. The liquid-eyed loveliness of the women, and the handsomeness of the men, with their black moustaches and their

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treacherous smiles; these, indeed, were things to gaze on.

" Oh ki! " Miami laughed delightedly, indicating a foppish, pretty youth, holding in a restive little horse dancing away with him.

Rubbing herself repeatedly, as yet embarrassed by the novelty of her clothes, Edna could only gasp.

" . . . ," she jabbered, pointing at some flaunting belles in great evening hats and falling hair.

" All dat fine," Miami murmured, staring in wonderment around.

Dominating the city soared the Opera House, uplifting a big, naked man, all gilt, who was being bitten, or mauled, so it seemed, by a pack of wild animals carved of stone, while nearby were the University, and the Cathedral, with its low white dome crowned by moss-green tiles.

Making towards it, encouraged by the Vesper bell, some young girls, in muslin masks, followed by a retinue of bustling nuns, were running the gauntlet of the profligates that clustered on the curb.

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"Oh, Jesus honey!" Edna cooed, scratching herself in an ecstasy of delight.

"Fo' shame, Chile, to act so unladylike; if any gen'leman look up he t'ink you make a wicked sign," Mrs. Mouth cautioned, stepping out upon the balcony from the sitting-room behind.

Inhaling a bottle of salvolatile, to dispel *de megrims,* she was looking dignified in a décolleté of smoke-blue tulle.

"Nebba do *dat* in s'ciety," she added, placing a protecting arm around each of her girls.

Seduced, not less than they, by the animation of the town, the fatigue of the journey seemed amply rewarded. It was amusing to watch the crowd before the Ciné Lara, across the way, where many were flocking attracted by the hectic posters of "A Wife's Revenge."

"I keep t'inking I see Nini Snagg," Mrs. Mouth observed, regarding a negress in emerald tinted silk, seated on a public-bench beneath the glittering greenery.

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"Cunan folk dat fine," Edna twittered, turning about at her Father's voice:

"W'en de day ob toil is done,
W'en de race ob life is run,
Heaven send thy weary one
Rest for evermore!"

"Prancing nigger! Is it worth while to wear dose grimaces?"

"Sh'o, dis no good place to be."

"Why, what dair wrong wid it?"

"Ah set out to look fo' de Meetin'-House, but no sooner am Ah in de street, dan a female wid her har droopin' loose down ober her back, an' into her eyes, she tell me to Come along."

"Some of dose bold women, dey ought to be shot through dair bottoms!" Mrs. Mouth indignantly said.

"But I nebba answer nothin'."

"May our daughters respect dair virtue same as you!" Mrs. Mouth returned, focusing wistfully the vast flowery parterre of the Café McDhu'l.

Little city of cocktails, Cuna! The surpassing excellence of thy Barmen, who shall sing?

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"See how dey spell 'Biar," Mammee," Miami tittered: "Dey forget de *i!*"

"Sh'o, chile, an' so dey do. . . ."

"Honey Jesus!" Edna broadly grinned: "Imagine de ignorance ob dat."

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VII

NOW, beyond the Alemeda, in the modish faubourg of Farananka, there lived a lady of both influence and wealth — the widow of the Inventor of Sunflower Piquant. Arbitress absolute of Cunan society, and owner, moreover, of a considerable portion of the town, the *veto* of Madame Ruiz, had caused the suicide indeed of more than one social climber. Unhappy, nostalgic, disdainful, selfish, ever about to abandon Cuna-Cuna to return to it no more, yet never budging, adoring her fairy villa far too well, Madame Ruiz while craving for the International-world, consoled herself by watching from afar European society going speedily to the dogs. Art loving, and considerably musical (many a dizzy venture at the Opera-house had owed its audition to her), she had, despite the self-centeredness of her nature, done not a little to render more brilliant the charming city it amused her with such vehemence to abuse.

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One softly gloomy morning, preceding Madame Ruiz's first *cotillon* of the Season, the lodge-keeper of the Villa Alba, a negress, like some great, violet bug, was surprised, while tending the brightly-hanging Grape-Fruit in the drive, by an imperative knocking on the gate. At such a matutinal hour only trashy errand-boys shouldering baskets might be expected to call, and giving the summons no heed, the mulatress continued her work.

The Villa Alba, half-buried in spreading awnings, and surrounded by many noble trees, stood but a short distance off the mainroad, its pleasaunces enclosed by flower-enshrouded walls, all a-zig-zag, like the folds of a screen. Beloved of lizards, and velvet-backed humming-birds, the shaded gardens led on one side to the sea.

"To make such a noise at dis hour," the negress murmured, going grumblingly at length to the gate, disclosing upon opening, a gentleman in middle-life, with a tooth-brush moustache and a sapphire ring.

"De mist'ess still in bed, sah."

"In bed?"

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" She out bery late sah, but you find Miss Edwards up."

And with a nod of thanks, the visitor directed his footsteps discreetly towards the house.

Although, not, precisely, *in* her bed when the caller, shortly afterwards, was announced, Madame Ruiz was nevertheless, as yet in *déshabille.*

" Tiresome man, what does he want to see me about?" she exclaimed, gathering around her a brocaded-wrap formed of a priestly cope.

" He referred to a lease, ma'am," the maid replied.

" A lease!" Madame Ruiz raised eyes dark with spleen.

The visit of her agent, or man of affairs, was apt to ruffle her composure for the day: " Tell him to leave it, and go," she commanded, selecting a nectarine from a basket of iced-fruits beside her.

Removing reflectively the sensitive skin, her mind evoked, in ironic review, the chief salient events of society, scheduled to take

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place on the face of the map in the course of the day.

The marriage of the Count de Nozhel, in Touraine, to Mrs. Exelmans of Cincinnati, the divorce of poor Lady Luckcock in London (it seemed quite certain that one of the five co-respondents was the little carrot-haired Lord Dubelly again), the last "pomps," at Vienna, of Princess de Seeyohl *née* Mitchening-Meyong (Peace to her soul! She had led her life). . . . The christening in Madrid of the girl-twins of the Queen of Spain. . . .

"At her time, I really *don't* understand it," Madame Ruiz murmured to herself aloud, glancing, as though for an explanation, about the room.

Through the flowing folds of the mosquito curtains of the bed, that swept a cool, flagged-floor, spread with skins, shewed the oratory, with its waxen flowers, and pendant flickering lights, that burned, night and day, before a Leonardo saint with a treacherous smile. Beyond the little recess came a lacquer commode, bearing a masterly marble group, depicting a pair of amorous herma-

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phrodites amusing themselves, while above, against the spacious wainscoting of the wall, a painting of a man, elegantly corseted, with a Violet in his moustache, 'Study of a Parisian,' was suspended, and which, with its pendant 'Portrait of a Lady,' signed Van Dongen, were the chief outstanding objects that the room contained.

"One would have thought that at forty she would have given up having babies," Madame Ruiz mused, choosing a glossy cherry from the basket at her side.

Through the open window a sound of distant music caught her ear.

"Ah! If only he were less weak," she sighed, her thoughts turning towards the player, who seemed to be enamoured of the opening movement, (rapturously repeated), of *L'Après midi d'un Faune.*

The venetorial habits of Vittorio Ruiz, had been from his earliest years, the source of his mother's constant chagrin and despair. At the age of five he had assaulted his Nurse, and, steadily onward, his passions had grown and grown. . . .

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"It's the fault of the wicked climate," Madame Ruiz reflected, as her companion, Miss Edwards, came in with the post.

"Thanks, Eurydice," she murmured, smilingly exchanging a butterfly kiss.

"It's going to be oh so hot, today!"

"Is it, dear?"

"Intense," Miss Edwards predicted, fluttering a gay-daubed paper fan.

Sprite-like, with a little strained ghost-face beneath a silver shock of hair, it seemed as if her long blue eyes had absorbed the Cunan sea.

"Do you remember the giant with the beard?" she asked, "at the Presidency fête?"

"Do I?"

"And we wondered who he could be!"

"Well?"

"He's the painter of Women's Backs, my dear!"

"The painter of women's *what?*"

"An artist."

"Oh."

"I wanted to know if you'd advise me to sit."

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"Your back is charming, dear, *c'est un dos d'élite.*"

"I doubt, though, it's classic," Miss Edwards murmured, pirouetting slowly before the glass.

But Madame Ruiz was perusing her correspondence, and seemed to be absorbed.

"They're to be married, in Munich, on the fifth," she chirruped.

"Who?"

"Elsie and Baron Sitmar."

"Ah, Ta-ra, dear! In those far worlds. . . ." Miss Edwards impatiently exclaimed, opening wide a window and leaning out.

Beneath the flame-trees, with their spreading tops, one mass of crimson flower, cooly, white-garbed gardeners, with naked feet, and big bell-shaped hats of straw, were sweeping slowly, as in some rhythmic dance, the flamboyant blossoms that had fallen to the ground.

"Wasn't little Madame Haase, dear, born Kattie von Guggenheim?"

"I really don't know," Miss Edwards returned, flapping away a fly with her fan.

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"This villanous climate! My memory's going. . . ."

"I wish I cared for Cuna less, that's all!" Miss Edwards said, her glancing following a humming-bird, poised in air, above the sparkling turquoise of a fountain.

"Captain Moonlight . . . duty . . . (tedious word) . . . can't come!"

"Oh?"

"Such a dull post," Madame Ruiz murmured, pausing to listen to the persuasive tenor-voice of her son.

"Little mauve nigger boy,
I t'ink you break my heart!"

"My poor Vitti! Bless him."

"He was out last night with some Chinese she."

"I understood him to be going to *Pelléas and Mélisande.*"

"He came to the Opera-house, but only for a minute."

"Dios!"

"And, oh, dearest," Miss Edwards dropped her cheek to her hand.

"Was Hatso as ever delicious?"

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Madame Ruiz asked, changing the topic as her woman returned, followed by a pomeranian of parts, ' Snob '; a dog beautiful as a child.

" We had Gebhardt instead."

" In Mélisande she's so huge," Madame Ruiz commented, eyeing severely the legal-looking packet which her maid had brought her.

" Business, Camilla; *how* I pity you! "

Madame Ruiz sighed.

" It seems," she said, " that for the next nine-and-ninety years, I have let a Villa to a Mr. and Mrs. Ahmadou Mouth."

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VIII

FLOOR of copper, floor of gold. . . .

Beyond the custom-house door, ajar, the street at sunrise seemed aflame.

"Have you nothing, young man, to declare?"

". . . Butterflies!"

"Exempt of duty. Pass."

Floor of silver, floor of pearl. . . .

Trailing a muslin net, and laughing for happiness, Charlie Mouth marched into the town.

Oh, Cuna-Cuna! Little city of Lies and Peril! How many careless young nigger boys have gone thus to seal their Doom?

Although the Sun-god was scarcely risen, already the radiant street teemed with life.

Veiled dames, flirting fans, bent on church or market, were issuing everywhere from their doors, and the air was vibrant with the sweet voice of bells.

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To rejoin his parents promptly at their hotel, was a promise he was tempted to forget.

Along streets all fresh and blue in the shade of falling awnings, it was fine, indeed, to loiter. Beneath the portico of a church, a running fountain drew his steps aside. Too shy to strip and squat in the basin, he was glad to bathe freely his head, feet and chest: then stirred by curiosity to throw a glance at the building, he lifted the long yellow nets that veiled the door.

It was the fashionable church of La Favavoa, and the extemporary address of the Archbishop of Cuna was in full, and impassioned, swing.

"Imagine the world, my friends, had Christ been born a girl!" he was saying in tones of tender dismay as Charlie entered.

Subsiding bashfully to a bench, Charlie gazed around.

So many sparkling fans. One, a delicate light mauve one: "Shucks! If only you wa' butterflies!" he breathed, contemplating with avidity the nonchalant throng; then perceiving a richer specimen splashed

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with silver of the same amative tint: "Oh you lil beauty!" And, clutching his itching net to his heart, he regretfully withdrew.

Sauntering leisurely through the cool, Mimosa-shaded streets, he approached, as he guessed, the Presidency. A score of shoeblacks, lolled at cards, or gossip, before its gilded pales. Amazed at their audacity (for the President had threatened more than once to "wring the Public's neck"), Charlie hastened by. Public gardens, brilliant with sarracenias, lay just beyond the palace, where a music-pavilion, surrounded by palms and rocking-chairs, appeared a favourite, and much frequented resort; from here he observed the Cunan bay strewn with sloops and white-sailed yachts, asleep upon the tide. Strolling on, he found himself in the busy vicinity of the Market. Although larger, and more varied, it resembled, in other respects, the village one at home.

"Say, honey, say"—crouching in the dust before a little pyre of mangoes, a lean-armed woman besought him to buy.

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Pursued by a confusion of voices, he threaded his way deftly down an alley dressed with booths. Pomegranates, some open with their crimson seeds displayed, banana-combs, and big, veined water-melons, lay heaped on every side.

"I could do wid a slice ob watteh-million," he reflected: "but to lick an ice-cream, dat tempt me more!" Nor would the noble fruit of the baobab, the paw-paw, or the pine, turn him from his fancy.

But no ice-cream stand met his eye, and presently he resigned himself to sit down upon his heels, in the shade of a potter's stall, and consider the passing crowd.

Missionaries with freckled hands and hairy, care-worn faces, followed by pale girls wielding tambourines of the Army of the Soul, foppish nigger bucks in panamas and palm-beach suits so cocky, Chinamen with osier baskets, their nostalgic eyes aswoon, heavily straw-hatted nuns trailing their dust-coloured rags, and suddenly, oh could it be, but there was no mistaking that golden waddle: "Mamma!"

Mamma, Mammee, Mrs. Ahmadou Mouth.

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All in white, with snow white shoes and hose so fine, he hardly dare.

"Mammee, Mammee, oh, Mammee . . . ."

"Sonny mine! My lil boy!"

"Mammee."

"Just to say!"

And, oh, honies! Close behind, behold Miami, and Edna too: The Miss Lips, the fair Lips, the smiling Lips. How spry each looked. The elder, (grown a trifle thinner), sweet *à ravir* in tomato-red, while her sister, plump as a cornfattened partridge, and very perceptibly powdered, seemed like the flower of the prairie sugar-cane when it breaks into bloom.

"We've been to a Music-hall, an' a pahty, an' Snowball has dropped black kittens." Forestalling Miami, Edna rapped it out.

"Oh, shucks!"

"An' since we go into s'ciety, we keep a boy in buttons!"

Mrs. Mouth turned about.

"Where is dat ijit coon?"

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"He stay behind to bargain for de pee-wee birds Mammee, fo' to make de taht."

"De swindling tortoise."

"An' dair are no vacancies at de University: not fo' any ob us!" Edna further retailed going off into a spasm of giggles.

She was swinging a wicker basket, from which there dangled the silver forked tail of a fish.

"Fo' goodness sake gib dat sea-porcupine to Ibum, chile," Mrs. Mouth commanded, as a perspiring niggerling in livery presented himself.

"Ibum, his arms are full already."

"Just come along all to de Villa now? It dat mignon an' all so nice. An' after de collation," Mrs. Mouth (shocked on the servant's account at her son's nude neck), raised her voice: "we go to de habadasher in Palmbranch Avenue, an' I buy you an Eton colleh!"

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IX

"PRANCING Nigger, I t'ink it bery strange, dat Madame Ruiz, she nebba call."

"Sh'o."

"In August-Town, s'ciety less stuck-up dan heah!"

Ensconced in rocking-chairs, in the shade of the ample porch of the Villa Vista Hermosa, Mr. and Mrs. Mouth had been holding a desultory *tête-à-tête*.

It was a Sabbath evening, and a sound of reedy pipes and bafalons, from a neighbouring café, filled with a feverish sadness the brilliantly lamp-lit street.

"De airs ob de nabehs, dat dair affair, what matter mo', am de chillens schoolin'."

"Prancing Nigger, I hope your Son an' Daughters will yet take dair Degrees, an' if not from de University, den from Home. From heah."

"Hey-ho-day, an' dat would be a miracle!" Mr. Mouth mirthlessly laughed.

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"Dose chillens hab learnt quite a lot already."

"'Bout de shaps an' cynemas!"

Mrs. Mouth disdained a reply.

She had taken the girls to the gallery at the Opera one night to hear 'Louise,' but they had come out, by tacit agreement, in the middle of it: the plainness of Louise's blouse, and the lack of tunes . . . added to which, the suffocation of the gallery . . . And — once bit twice shy — they had not gone back again.

"All your fambly need, Prancing Nigger, is social opportunity! But what is de good ob de Babtist parson?"

Mr. Mouth sketched a gesture.

"Sh'o, Edna, she some young yet. . . . But Miami dat distinguée; an', doh I her mother, b'lieb me dat is one ob de choicest girls I see; an' dat's de trute."

"It queer," Mr. Mouth abstrusely murmured, "how many skeeter-bugs dair are 'bout dis ebenin'!"

"De begonias in de window-boxes most lik'ly draw dem. But as I was saying Prancing Nigger, I t'ink it bery strange dat Madame Ruiz nebba call."

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"P'raps, she out ob town."

"Accordin' to de paper, she bin habing her back painted, but what dat fo' I dunno."

"Ah shouldn't wonder ef she hab some trouble ob a dorsal kind; same as me gramma mumma long agone."

"Dair'd be no harm in sendin' one ob de chillens to enquire. Wha' you t'ink, sah?" Mrs. Mouth demanded, plucking from off the porch a pale hanging flower with a languorous scent.

Mr. Mouth glanced apprehensively skyward.

The mutters of thunder and intermittent lightning of the finest nights.

"It's a misfortnit we eber left Mediavilla," he exclaimed uneasily, as a falling star, known as a thief star, sped swiftly down the sky.

"Prancing Nigger," Mrs. Mouth rose remarking, "befo' you start to grummle, I leab you alone to your Jereymiads!"

"A misfortnit sho' nuff," he mused, and regret for the savannah country, and the tall palm trees of his village, oppressed his heart. Moreover, his means (derived from

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the cultivation of the *Musa paradisica,* or Banana), seemed likely to prove ere long inadequate to support the whims of his wife, who after a lifetime of contented nudity, appeared to be now almost insatiable for dress.

A discordant noise from above interrupted the trend of his thoughts.

"Sh'o, she plays wid it like a toy," he sighed, as the sound occurred again.

"Prancing Nigger, de water-supply cut off!"

"It's de Lord's will."

"Dair's not a drop my lub in de privy."

"'Cos it always in use!"

"I b'lieb dat lil half-caste Ibum, 'cos I threaten to gib him notice, do somet'in' out ob malace to de chain."

"Whom de Lord Loveth, He chasteneth!" Mr. Mouth observed, "an' dose bery words (ef you look) you will find in de twelfth chapter, an' de sixth berse ob de Book ob Hebrews."

"Prancing Nigger, you datways selfish! Always t'inkin' ob your soul, instead ob your obligations towards de fambly."

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"Why, wha' mo' can I do dan I've done?"

Mrs. Mouth faintly shrugged.

"I had hoped," she said, "dat Nini would hab bin ob use to de girls, but dat seem now impossible!" For Mrs. Snagg had been traced to a house of ill-fame, where, it appeared, she was an exponent of the Hodeidah — a lascive Cunan dance.

"Understand dat any sort ob intimacy 'tween de Villa an' de *Closerie des Lilas* Ah must flatly forbid."

"Prancing Nigger, as ef I should take your innocent chillens to call on po' Nini; not dat eberyt'ing about her at de *Closerie* is not elegant an' nice. Sh'o, some ob de inmates ob dat establishment possess mo' diamonds dan dair betters do outside! You'd be surprised ef you could see what two ob de girls dair, Dinah an' Lew. . . ."

"Enuf!"

"It isn't always Virtue, Prancing Nigger, dat come off best!" And Mrs. Mouth might have offered further observations on the matter of ethics, had not her husband left her.

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X

PAST the Presidency and the public park, the Theatres Maxine Bush, Eden-Garden, and Apollo, along the Avenida, and the Jazz-halls by the wharf, past little suburban shops, and old, deserted churchyards where bloom geraniums, through streets of squalid houses, and onward skirting pleasure lawns and orchards, bibbitty-bobbitty, beneath the sovereign brightness of the sky, the Farananka tram crawled along.

Surveying the landscape listlessly through the sticks of her fan, Miss Edna Mouth grew slightly bored — alas, poor child; couldst thou have guessed the blazing brightness of thy Star, thou wouldst doubtless have been more alert!

"Sh'o, it dat far an' tejus," she observed to the conductor, lifting upon him the sharp-soft eyes of a parroquet.

She was looking bewitching in a frock of silverish *mousseleine* and a violet tallyho

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cap, and dangled upon her knees an intoxicating sheaf of blossoms, known as Marvel of Peru.

"Hab patience lil Missey, an' we soon be dah."

* * * * * *

"He tells me, dear child, he tells me," Madame Ruiz was rounding a garden path, upon the arm of her son, "he tells me, Vitti, that the systole and diastole of my heart's muscles are slightly inflamed; and, that, I ought, darling, to be *very* careful. . . ."

Followed by a handsome borzoi, and the pomeranian Snob, the pair were taking their usual post-prandial exercise beneath the trees.

"Let me come, mother, dear," he murmured without interrupting, "over the other side of you; I always like to be on the right side of my profile!"

"And, really, since the affair of Madame de Bazvalon, my health has hardly been what it was."

"That foolish little woman," he uncomfortably laughed.

"He tells me my nerves need rest," she

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declared, looking pathetically up at him.

He had the nose of an actress, and ink-black hair streaked with gold, his eyes seemed to be covered with the freshest of fresh dark pollen, while nothing could exceed the vivid pallor of his cheeks, or the bright sanguine of his mouth.

"You go out so much, Mother."

"Not so much!"

"So very much."

"And he forbids me my opera-box for the rest of the week! So last night I sat at home dear child reading the Life of Lazarillo de Tormes."

"I don't give a damn," he said, "for any of your doctors."

"So vexing though; and apparently Lady Bird has been at death's door, and poor Peggy Povey too. It seems she got wet on the way to the Races: and really I was *sorry* for her when I saw her in the paddock; for the oats and the corn, and the wheat and the tares, and the barley and the rye, and all the rest of the reeds and grasses in her pretty Lancret hat, looked like nothing so much as manure."

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"I adore to folly her schoolboy's moustache!"

"My dear, Age is the one disaster," Madame Ruiz remarked, raising the rosy dome of her sunshade a degree higher above her head.

They were pacing a walk radiant with trees and flowers as some magician's garden, that commanded a sweeping prospect of long, livid sands, against a white green sea.

"There would seem to be several new yachts, darling," Madame Ruiz observed.

"The duke of Wellclose with his duchess (on their wedding-tour) arrived with the tide."

"Poor man; I'm told that he only drove to the church after thirty brandies!"

"And the Sea-Thistle, with Lady Violet Valesbridge, and, *oh*, such a crowd."

"She used to be known as 'The Cat of Curzon Street,' but I hear she is still quite amazingly pretty," Madame Ruiz murmured, turning to admire a somnolent peacock, with moping fan, poised upon the curved still arm of a marble mænad.

"How sweet something smells."

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"It's the China lilies."

"I believe it's my handkerchief . . ." he said.

"Vain wicked boy; ah, if you would but decide, and marry some nice, intelligent girl."

"I'm too young yet."

"You're *twenty-six!*"

"And past the age of folly-o," he made airy answer, drawing from his breast-pocket a flat, jewel-encrusted case, and lighting a cigarette.

"Think of the many men, darling, of twenty-six . . ." Madame Ruiz broke off, focussing the fruit-bearing summit of a slender arecia palm.

"Foll-foll-folly-o!" he laughed.

"I think I'm going in."

"Oh, why?"

"Because," Madame Ruiz repressed a yawn, "because, dear, I feel armchairish."

With a kiss of the finger tips (decidedly distinguished hands had Vittorio Ruiz), he turned away.

Joying frankly in excess, the fiery noon-tide hour had a special charm for him.

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It was the hour, to be sure, of "the Fawn!"

"Aho, Ahi, Aha!" he carolled, descending half-trippingly a few white winding stairs, that brought him upon a fountain. Palms, with their floating fronds, radiating light, stood all around.

It was here "the creative mood" would sometimes take him, for he possessed no small measure of talent of his own.

His *Three Hodeidahs,* and *Five Phallic Dances for Pianoforte and Orchestra,* otherwise known as "Suite in Green," had taken the whole concert world by storm, and, now, growing more audacious, he was engaged upon an opera to be known, by and by, as *Sumaïa.*

"Ah Atthis, it was Sappho who told me — " tentatively he sought an air.

A touch of banter there.

"*Ah Atthis* — " One must make the girl feel that her little secret is out . . . ; quiz her; but let her know, and pretty plain, that the Poetess had been talking. . . .

"Ah Atthis — "

But somehow or other the lyric mood

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today was obdurate, and not to be persuaded.

"I blame the oysters! After oysters —" he murmured, turning about to ascertain what was exciting the dogs.

She was coming up the drive with her face to the sun, her body shielded behind a spreading bouquet of circumstance.

"It's all right; they'll not hurt you."

"Sh'o, I not afraid!"

"Tell me who it is you wish to see."

"Mammee send me wid dese flowehs. . . ."

"Oh! But how scrumptious."

"It strange how dey call de bees; honeybees, sweat-bees, bumble-bees an' all!" she murmured, shaking the blossoms into the air.

"That's only natural," he returned, his hand falling lightly to her arm.

"Madame Ruiz is in?"

"She is: but she is resting; and something tells me," he suavely added, indicating a grassy bank, "you might care to repose yourself too."

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And indeed after such a long and rambling course, she was glad to accept.

"De groung's as soft as a cushom," she purred, sinking with nonchalance to the grass.

"You'd find it," he said, "even softer, if you'll try it nearer me."

"Dis a mighty pretty place!"

"And you — " but he checked his tongue.

"Fo' a villa so grand, dair must be mo' dan one privy?"

"Some six, or seven!"

"Ours is broke."

"You should get it mended."

"De aggervatines'!" she wriggled.

"Tell me about them."

And so, not without digressions, she unfolded her life.

"Then you, Charlie, and Mimi are here, dear, to study?"

"As soon as de University is able to receibe us; but dair's a waiting-list already dat long."

"And what do you do with all your spare time?"

"Goin' round de shops takes up some ob

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it. An' den ob course, dair's de Cinés. Oh, I love de Lara. We went last night to see Souls in Hell."

"I've not been!"

"Oh it was choice."

"Was it? Why?"

"De scene ob dat story," she told him, "happen foreign; 'way crost de big watteh, on de odder side ob de world . . . an' de principal gal, she merried to a man who neglect her (ebery ebenin' he go to pahtys an' biars) while all de time his wife she sit at home wid her lil pickney at her breas'. But dair anodder gemplum (a friend ob de fambly) an' he afiah to woe her; but she only shake de head, slowly, from side to side, an' send dat man away. Den de hubsom lose his fortune, an', oh, she dat 'stracted, she dat crazed . . . at last, she take to gamblin', but dat only make t'ings worse. Den de friend ob de fambly come back, an' offer to pay all de expenses ef only she unbend: so she cry, an' she cry, 'cos it grieb her to leab her pickney to de neglect ob de serbants (dair was three ob dem, an old buckler, a boy, an' a cook) but,

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in de end, she do, an' frtt! away she go in de fambly carriage. An' den, bimeby, you see dem in de bedroom doin' a bit ob funning."

"What?"

"Oh ki; it put me in de gigglemints...."

"Exquisite kid."

"Sh'o, de coffee-concerts an' de pictchures, I don't nebba tiah ob dem."

"Bad baby."

"I turned thirteen."

"You are?"

"By de Law ob de Island, I a spinster ob age!"

"I might have guessed it was the Bar! These Law-students," he murmured, addressing the birds.

"Sh'o, it's de trute," she pouted, with a languishing glance through the sticks of her fan.

"I don't doubt it," he answered, taking lightly her hand.

"Mercy," she marvelled: "is dat a watch dah, on your arm?"

"Dark, bright baby!"

"Oh, an' de lil 'V.R.' all in precious

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stones so blue," her frail fingers caressed his wrist.

"Exquisite kid." She was in his arms.

"Vitti, Vitti! — " It was the voice of Eurydice Edwards. Her face was strained and quivering. She seemed about to faint.

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XI

EVER so lovely are the young men of Cuna-Cuna — Juarez, Jotifa, Enid — (these, from many, to distinguish but a few) — but none so delicate, charming, and squeamish, as Charlie Mouth.

"Attractive little Rose. . . ." "What a devil of a dream . . ." the avid belles would exclaim when he walked abroad, while impassioned widows would whisper "Peach!"

One evening, towards sundown, just as the city lifts its awnings, and the deserted streets start seething with delight, he left his home to enjoy the grateful air. It had been a day of singular oppressiveness, and not expecting overmuch of the vesperal breezes, he had borrowed his mother's small Pompadour fan.

Ah, little did that nigger boy know as he strolled along what novel emotions that promenade held in store!

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Disrelishing the dust of the Avenida, he directed his steps towards the Park.

He had formed already an acquaintanceship with several young men, members, it seemed, of the University, and these he would sometimes join, about this hour, beneath the Calabash-trees in the Marcella Gardens.

There was Abe, a lad of fifteen, whose father ran a Jazz Hall on the harbour-beach, and Ramon, who was destined to enter the Church, and the intriguing Esmé, whose dream was the Stage, and who was supposed to be "in touch" with Miss Maxine Bush, and there was Pedro, Pedro ardent and obese, who seemed to imagine that to be a dress-designer to foreign Princesses would yield his several talents a thrice-blessed harvest.

Brooding on these and other matters, Charlie found himself in Liberty Square.

Here, the Cunan Poet, Samba Marcella's effigy arose — that "sable singer of Revolt."

Aloft, on a pedestal, soared the Poet, laurel-crowned, thick-lipped, woolly, a large

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weeping Genius, with a bold taste for draperies, hovering just beneath; her one eye closed, the other open, giving her an air of winking confidentially at the passers-by: "Up Cunans, up! To arms, to arms!" he quoted, lingering to watch the playful swallows wheeling among the tubs of rose-oleanders that stood around.

And a thirst, less for bloodshed, than for a sherbet, seized him.

It was a square noted for the frequency of its bars, and many of their names, in flickering lights, shewed palely forth already.

Cuna! City of Moonstones; how faeric art thou in the blue blur of dusk!

Costa Rica. Chile Bar. To the Island of June. . . .

Red roses, against tall mirrors, reflecting the falling night.

Seated before a cloudy cocktail, a girl with gold cheeks like the flesh of peaches, addressed him softly from behind: "Listen, lion!"

But he merely smiled on himself in the

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polished mirrors, displaying moist-gleaming teeth and coral gums.

An aroma of aromatic cloves . . . a mystic murmur of ice. . . .

A little dazed after a Ron Bacardi, he moved away: "Shine sah?" the inveigling squeak of a shoeblack followed him.

Sauntering by the dusty benches by the pavement-side, where white-robed negresses sat communing in twos and threes, he attained the Avenue Messalina with its spreading palms, whose fronds hung nerveless in the windless air.

Tinkling mandolines from restaurant gardens, light laughter, and shifting lights.

Passing before the Café de Cuna, and a people's "Dancing," he roamed leisurely along. Incipient Cyprians, led by vigilant, blanched-faced queens, youths of a certain life, known as bwam-wams, gaunt pariah-dogs with questing eyes, all equally were on the prowl. Beneath the Pharaohic pilasters of the Theatre Maxine Bush, a street crowd had formed before a notice described "Important," which informed the Public, that owing to a "temporary hoarseness," the

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rôle of Miss Maxine Bush would be taken, on that occasion, by Miss Pauline Collier.

The Marcella Gardens lay towards the end of the Avenue, in the animated vicinity of the Opera. Pursuing the glittering thoroughfare, it was interesting to observe the pleasure announcements of the various theatres, picked out in signs of fire: *Aïda: The Jewels of the Madonna: Marthe Regnier's Season.*

Vending bags of roasted peanuts, or sapadillos and avocado pears, insistent small boys were importuning the throng.

"Go away; I can't be bodder," Charlie was saying, when he seemed to slip; it was as though the pavement were a carpet snatched from under him, and looking round, he was surprised to see, in a Confectioner's window, a couple of marble-topped tables start merrily waltzing together.

Driven onward by those behind, he began stumblingly to run towards the Park. It was the general goal. Footing it a little ahead, two loose women and a gay young man (pursued by a waiter with a napkin

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and a bill), together with the horrified, half-crazed crowd; all, helter-skelter, were intent upon the Park.

Above the Calabash trees, bronze, demoniac, the moon gleamed sourly from a starless sky, and although not a breath of air was stirring, the crests of the loftiest palms were set arustling by the vibration at their roots.

"Oh, will nobody *stop* it?" a terror-struck lady implored.

Feeling quite white and clasping a fetish, Charlie sank all panting to the ground.

Safe from falling chimney-pots and sign-boards, that, for "Pure Vaseline," for instance, had all but caught him, he had much to be thankful for.

"Sh'o nuff, dat was a close shave," he gasped, gazing dazed about him.

Clustered back to back nearby upon the grass, three stolid matrons, matrons of hoary England, evidently not without previous earthquake experience, were ignoring resolutely the repeated shocks:

"I always follow the Fashions, dear, at a distance!" one was saying: "this little

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gingham gown I'm wearing, I had made for me after a design I found in a newspaper at my hotel."

"It must have been a pretty old one, dear — I mean the paper, of course."

"New things are only those you know that have been forgotten."

"Mary . . . there's a sharp pin, sweet, at the back of your . . . *Oh!*"

Venturing upon his legs, Charlie turned away.

By the Park palings a few "Salvationists" were holding forth, while in the sweep before the bandstand, the artists from the Opera in their costumes of Aïda, were causing almost a greater panic, among the ignorant, than the earthquake was itself. A crowd promiscuous rather than representative, composed variously of chauffeurs (making a wretched pretence, poor chaps, of seeking out their masters), Cyprians, patricians (these in opera cloaks and sparkling diamonds), tourists. for whom the Hodeidah girls would *not* dance that night, and bwam-wam bwam-wams, whose equivocal behaviour, indeed, was per-

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haps more shocking even than the shocks, set the pent Park ahum. Yet, notwithstanding the upheavals of Nature, certain persons there were bravely making new plans.

"How I wish I could, dear! But I shall be having a houseful of women over Sunday — that's to say."

"Then come the week after."

"Thanks, then, I *will*."

Hoping to meet with Abe, Charlie took a pathway, flanked with rows of tangled roses, whose leaves shook down at every step.

And it occurred to him with alarming force that perhaps he was an orphan.

Papee, Mammee, Mimi and lil Edna — the villa drawing-room on the floor. . . .

His heart stopped still.

"An' dey in de spirrit world — in heaven hereafter!" He glanced with awe at the moon's dark disk.

"All in dair cotton shrouds . . ."

What if he should die and go to the Bad Place below?

"I mizzable sinneh Lord. You heah

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Sah? You heah me say dat? Oh, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus," and weeping, he threw himself down among a bed of flowers.

When he raised his face it was towards a sky all primrose and silver pink. Sunk deep in his dew laved bower, it was sweet to behold the light. Above him great spikes of blossom were stirring in the idle wind, while birds were piping anthems among the palms. And in thanksgiving, too, arose the matins bells. From Our Lady of the Pillar, from the church of La Favavoa in the West, from Saint Sebastian, from Our Lady of the Sea, from Our Lady of Mount Carmel, from Santa Theresa, from Saint Francis of the Poor.

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XII

BUT although by the grace of Providence, the city of Cuna-Cuna had been spared, other parts of the island had sustained irremediable loss. In the Province of Casuby, beyond the May Day Mountains, many a fair Banana, or Sugar estate, had been pitifully wrecked, yet what caused perhaps the widest regret among the Cunan public, was the destruction of the famous convent of Sasabonsam. One of the beauties of the island, one of the gems of tropic architecture celebrated, made immortal (in *The Picnic*), by the Poet Marcella, had disappeared. A Relief Fund for those afflicted had at once been started, and as if this were not enough, the doors of the Villa Alba were about to be thrown open for "An Evening of Song and Gala," in the causes of charity.

"Prancing Nigger, dis an event to take exvantage ob; dis not a lil t'ing love to be sneezed at at all," Mrs. Mouth eagerly said

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upon hearing the news, and she had gone about ever since, reciting the names of the list of Patronesses, including that of the Cunan Archbishop.

It was the auspicious evening.

In their commodious, jointly-shared bedroom, the Miss Lips, the fair Lips, the smiling Lips were maiding one another in what they both considered to be the "Parisian way"; a way, it appeared, that involved much nudging, arch laughter, and, even, some prodding.

"In love? Up to my ankles! Oh, yes." Edna blithely chuckled.

"Up to your topnot!" her sister returned, making as if to pull it.

But with the butt end of the curling-tongs, Edna waved her away.

Since her visit to the Villa Alba "me, an' Misteh Ruiz" was all her talk, and to be his reigning mistress the summit of her dreams.

"Come on man wid dose tongs; 'cos I want 'em myself," Miami murmured, pinning a knot of the sweet Night Jasmyn deftly above her ear.

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Its aroma evoked Bamboo.

Oh, why had he not joined her? Why did he delay? Had he forgotten their delight among the trees, the giant silk cotton trees, with the hammer-tree-frogs chanting in the dark: Rig-a-jig-jig, rig-a-jig-jig?

"Which you like de best man, dis lil necklash or de odder?" Edna asked, essaying a strand of orchid tinted beads about her throat.

"I'd wear dem both," her sister advised.

"I t'ink, on de whole, I wear de odder; de one he gib me de time he take exvantage ob my innocence."

"Since dose imitation pearls, honey,— he gib you anyt'ing else?"

"No; but he dat generous! He say he mean to make me a lil pickney gal darter: An', oh, won't dat be a day," Edna fluted, breaking off at the sound of her mother's voice in the corridor.

". . . and tell de cabman to take de fly-bonnets off de horses," she was instructing Ibum as she entered the room.

She had a gown of the new mignonette

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satin, with " episcopal " sleeves lined with red.

" Come girls, de cab is waiting; but perhaps you no savey dat."

They didn't; and, for some time, dire was the confusion.

In the Peacock drawing-room of the Villa Alba, the stirring ballet music from *Isfahan,* filled the vast room with its thrilling madness. Upon a raised estrade, a corps of dancing boys from Sankor, had glided amid a murmur of applause.

The combination of charity and amusement had brought together a crowded, and cosmopolitan assembly, and early though it was it was evident already, that with many more new advents there would be a shortage of chairs. From their yachts had come several distinguished birds of passage, exhaling an atmosphere of Paris and Park Lane.

Wielding a heavy bouquet of black feathers, Madame Ruiz, robed in a gown of malmaison cloth-of-silver, watched the dancers from an alcove by the door.

Their swaying torsos, and weaving glid-

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ing feet, fettered with chains of orchids and hung with bells, held a fascination for her.

"My dear they beat the Hodeidahs! I'm sure I never saw anything like it," the Duchess of Wellclose remarked admiringly: "That little one Fred," she murmured, turning towards the Duke.

A piece of praise, a staid, small body in a demure lace cap chanced to hear.

This was "the incomparable" Miss McAdam, the veteran ballet mistress of the Opera-house, and inventrix of the dance. Born in the frigid High Street of Aberdeen, "Alice," as she was universally known among enthusiastic patrons of the ballet, had come originally to the tropics as companion to a widowed clergyman in Orders, when, as she would relate (in her picturesque, native brogue), at the sight of *Nature* her soul had awoke. Self-expression had come with a rush; and, now, that she was ballet mistress of the Cunan opera, some of the daring *ensembles* of the Scottish spinster, would embarrass, even the good Cunans themselves.

"I've warned the lads," she whispered to

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Madame Ruiz: "to cut their final figure, on account of the Archbishop. But young boys (bless their little —) are so excitable, and I expect that they'll forget!"

Gazing on their perfect backs, Madame Ruiz could not but mourn the fate of the Painter, who, like Dalow, had specialized almost exclusively, on this aspect of the human form; for, alas, that admirable Artist had been claimed by the Quake; and although his portrait of Madame Ruiz remained unfinished . . . there was still a mole, nevertheless, in gratitude, and as a mark of respect, she had sent her Rolls car to the Mass in honour of his obsequies, with the *crêpe* off an old black dinner-dress tied across the lamps.

"I see they're going to," Miss McAdam murmured, craning a little to focus the Archbishop, then descanting to two ladies with deep purple fans.

"Ah, well! It's what they do in *Isfahan,*" Madame Ruiz commented, turning to greet her neighbour Lady Bird.

"Am I late for Gebhardt?" she asked, as if Life itself hinged upon the reply.

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A quietly silly woman, Madame Ruiz was often obliged to lament the absence of intellect at her door: accounting for it as the consequence of a weakness for negroes, combined with a hopeless passion for the Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford.

But the strident cries of the dancers, and the increasing volume of the music, discouraged all talk, though ladies with collection-boxes (biding their time) were beginning furtively to select their next quarry.

Countess Katty Taosay, *née* Soderini, a little woman and sure of the giants, could feel in her psychic veins which men were most likely to empty their pockets: English Consul . . . pale and interesting, he not refuse to stoop and fumble, nor Follinsbe 'Peter,' the slender husband of a fashionable wife, or Charlie Campfire, a young boy like an injured camel, heir to vast banana estates, the darling, and six foot high if an inch.

"Why do big men like little women?" she wondered, waving a fan powdered with blue *paillettes:* and she was still casting

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about for a reason, when the hectic music stopped.

And now the room echoed briefly with applause, while admiration was divided between the superexcellence of the dancers, and the living beauty of the rugs which their feet had trod — rare rugs from Bokhara-i-Shareef, and Kairouan-city-of-Prayer, lent by the mistress of the house.

Entering on the last hand-clap, Mr. and Mrs. Mouth, followed by their daughters, felt, each, in their several ways, they might expect to enjoy themselves.

"Prancing Nigger, what a *furore!*" Mrs. Mouth exclaimed. "You b'lieb, I hope, now, dat our tickets was worth de money."

Plucking at the swallow-tails of an evening 'West-End,' Mr. Mouth was disinclined to reopen a threadbare topic.

"It queah how few neegah dair be," he observed, scanning the brilliant audience, many of whom, taking advantage of an interval, were flocking towards a buffet in an adjoining conservatory.

"Prancing Nigger, I feel I could do wid a glass ob champagne."

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Passing across a corridor, it would have been interesting to have explored the spacious vistas that loomed beyond: "Dat must be one ob de priveys," Edna murmured, pointing to a distant door.

"Seben, chile, did you say?"

"If not more!"

"She seem fond ob flowehs," Mr. Mouth commented, pausing to notice the various plants that lined the way: from the roof swung showery azure flowers that commingled with the theatrically-hued cañas, set out in crude, bold, colour-schemes below, that looked best at night. But in their malignant splendour, the orchids were the thing. Mrs. Abanathy, Ronald Firbank, (a dingy lilac blossom of rarity untold), Prince Palairet, a heavy blue-spotted flower, and rosy Olive Moonlight, were those that claimed the greatest respect from a few discerning connoisseurs.

"Prancing Nigger, you got a chalk mark on your 'West-End,' come heah, sah, an' let me brush it."

Hopeful of glimpsing Vittorio, Miami and Edna sauntered on. With arms loosely

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entwined about each other's hips, they made in their complete insouciance, a conspicuous couple.

"I'd give sumpin' to see de bedrooms, man, 'cos dair are chapels, and' barf-rooms, besides odder conveniences off dem," Edna related, returning a virulent glance from Miss Eurydice Edwards, with a contemptuous, pitying smile.

Traversing a throng, sampling sorbets, and ices, the sisters strolled out upon the lawn.

The big silver stars how clear they shone — infinitudes, infinitudes. . . .

"Adieu, hydrangeas, adieu, blue, burning South!"

The concert, it seemed, had begun.

"Come chillens, come!"

In the vast drawing-room, the first novelty of the evening — an aria from *Sumaïa* — had stilled all chatter. Deep-sweet, poignant, the singer's voice was conjuring Sumaïa's farewell to the Greek isle of Mitylene, bidding farewell to its gracious women, and to the trees of white, or turquoise, in the gardens of Lesbos.

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"Adieu, hydrangeas — "

Hardly a suitable moment, perhaps, to dispute a chair! But neither the duchess of Wellclose or Mrs. Mouth were creatures easily abashed.

"I pay, an' I mean to hab it."

"You can't; it's taken!" the duchess returned, nodding meaningly towards the buffet, where the duke could be seen swizzling whiskey at the back of the bar.

"Sh'o! Dese white women seem to t'ink dey can hab ebberyt'ing."

"Taken," the duchess repeated, who disliked what she called the *parfum d'Afrique* of the "sooties," and as though to intimidate Mrs. Mouth, she gave her a look that would have made many a Peeress in London quail.

Nevertheless in the stir that followed the song, chairs were forthcoming.

"From de complexion dat female hab, she look as doh she bin boiling bananas!" Mrs. Mouth commented comfortably, loud enough for the duchess to hear.

"Such a large congregation should su'tinly assist de fund!" Mr. Mouth re-

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sourcefully said, envisaging with interest the audience; it was not every day that one could feast the gaze on the noble baldness of the Archbishop, or on the subtle *silhouette* of Miss Maxine Bush, swathed like an idol in an Egyptian tissue woven with magical eyes.

"De woman in de window dah," Mrs. Mouth remarked, indicating a dowager who had the hard, but resigned look of the Mother of six daughters, in immediate succession, "hab a look, Prancing Nigger, ob your favourite statesman."

"De immortal Wilberforce!"

"I s'poge it's de whiskers," Mrs. Mouth replied, ruffling gently her "Borgia" sleeves for the benefit of the Archbishop. Rumour had it he was fond of negresses, and that the black private secretary he employed was his own natural son, while some suspected indeed a less natural connexion.

But Madame Hatso (of Blue Brazil, the Argentine; those nights in Venezuela and Buenos Ayres, "bis" and "bravas"! How the public had roared) was curtseying right and left, and glancing round to address

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her daughters, Mrs. Mouth perceived with vexation that Edna had vanished.

In the garden he caught her to him: "Flower of the Sugar cane!"

"Misteh Ruiz. . . ."

"Exquisite kid."

"I saw you thu de window-glass all de time, an' dair was I! laughing so silent-ly. . . ."

"My little honey."

". . . no; 'cos ob de nabehs," she fluted, drawing him beneath the great flamboyants that stood like temples of darkness all around.

"Sweetheart."

"I 'clar to grashis!" she delightedly crooned as he gathered her up in his arms.

"My little Edna. . . . ? . . . ? . . . ?"

"Where you goin' wid me to?"

"There," and he nodded towards the white sea sand.

A yawning butler, an insolent footman, a snoring coachman, a drooping horse. . . .

The last conveyance had driven away, and

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only a party of "b — d — y niggers," supposed to be waiting for their daughter, was keeping the domestics from their bed.

Ernest, the bepowdered footman, believed them to be thieves, and could have sworn he saw a tablespoon in the old coon's pocket.

Hardly able to restrain his tears, Mr. Mouth sat gazing vacuously at the floor.

"Wha' can keep de chile? . . . Oh Lord . . . I hope dair noddin' wrong."

"On such a lovely ebenin' what is time!" Mrs. Mouth exclaimed, taking up an attitude of night-enchantment by the open door.

A remark that caused Butler, and subordinate, to cough.

"It not often I see de cosmos look so special!"

"Ef she not heah soon, we better go widout her," Miami murmured, who was examining the visitors cards on the hall table undismayed by the eye of Ernest.

It's odd she should so procrastinate; but la jeunesse, c'est le temps ou l'on s'amuse," Mrs. Mouth blandly declared, seating herself tranquilly by her husband's side.

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"Dair noddin', I hope, de matteh. . . ."

"Eh, suz, my deah! Eh, suz." Reassuringly, she tapped his arm.

"Sir Victor Virtue, Lady Bird, Princess Altamisal," Miami tossed their cards.

"Sh'o it was a charming ebenin'! Doh I was sorry for de duchess, wid de duke, an' he all nasty drunk wid spirits."

"I s'poge she use to it."

"It was a perfect skangle! Howebber, on de whole, it was quite an enjoyable pahty — doh dat music ob Wagner, it gib me de retches."

"It bore me, too," Miami confessed, as a couple of underfootmen made their appearance, and joining their fidgeting colleagues by the door, waited for the last guests to depart, in a mocking, whispering group.

"Ef she not here bery soon," Miami murmured, vexed by the servants impertinent smiles.

"Sh'o, she be here directly," Mrs. Mouth returned, appraising through her fan-sticks the footman's calves.

"It daybreak already!" Miami yawned,

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moved to elfish mirth by the overemphasis of rouge on her mother's round cheeks.

But under the domestics' mocking stare, their talk at length was chilled to silence.

From the garden came the plaintive wheepling of a bird, (intermingled with the coachman's spasmodic snores), while above the awning of the door, the stars were wanly paling.

"Prancing nigger, sah, heah de day. Dair no good waitin' any more."

It was on their return from the Villa Alba, that they found a letter signed 'Mamma Luna,' announcing the death of Bamboo.

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XIII

HE HAD gone out it seemed upon the sea to avoid the earthquake (leaving his mother at home to take care of the shop), but the boat had overturned, and the evil sharks . . .

In a room darkened against the sun, Miami, distracted, wept. Crunched by the maw of a great blue shark: " Oh honey."

Face downward with one limp arm dangling to the floor, she bemoaned her loss: such love-blank, and aching void! Like some desolate, empty cave, filled with clouds, so her heart.

" An' to t'ink dat I eber teased you! " she moaned, reproaching herself for the heedless past; and as day passed over day, still she wept.

One mid-afternoon, it was some two weeks later, she was reclining lifelessly across the bed, gazing at the sunblots on the floor. There had been a mild disturbance of a volcanic nature that morning, and

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indeed slight though unmistakable shocks, had been sensed repeatedly of late.

"Intercession" services, fully choral — the latest craze of society — filled the churches at present, sadly at the expense of other places of amusement; many of which had been obliged to close down. A religious revival was in the air, and in the Parks and streets elegant dames would stop one another in their passing carriages, and pour out the stories of their iniquitous lives.

Disturbed by the tolling of a neighbouring bell, Miami reluctantly rose.

"Lord! What a din; it gib a po' soul de grabe-yahd creeps," she murmured, lifting the jalousie of a sun-shutter and peering idly out.

Standing in the street was a Chinese Laundrymaid, chatting with two Chinamen with osier baskets, while a gaunt pariah dog was rummaging among some egg-shells and banana-skins in the dust before the gate.

"Dat lil fool-fool Ibum, he throw ebbery-t'ing out ob de window, an' nebba t'ink ob de stink," she commented, as an odour of

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decay was wafted in on a gust of the hot trade wind. The trade winds! How pleasantly they used to blow in the village of Mediavilla. The blue trade wind, the gold trade wind caressing the bending canes.... City life, what had it done for any of them, after all? Edna a harlot (since she had left them there was no other word), and Charlie fast going to pieces, having joined the Promenade of a notorious Bar with its bright particular galaxy of boys.

"Sh'o, ebberyt'ing happier back dah," she mused, following the slow gait across the street of some bare-footed nuns; soon they would be returning, with many converts and pilgrims, to Sasabonsam, beyond the May Day Mountains, where remained a miraculous image of Our Lady of the Sorrows still intact. How if she joined them, too? A desire to express her grief, and thereby ease it, possessed her. In the old times there had been many ways: tribal dances, and wild austerities. . . .

She was still musing self-absorbed, when her mother, much later, came in from the street.

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There had been a great Intercessional, it seemed, at the cathedral, with hired singers, from the Opera House and society women as thick as thieves, "*gnats,*" she had meant to say (Tee-hee!) about a corpse. Arturo Arrivabene . . . a voice like a bull . . . and she had caught a glimpse of Edna driving on the Avenue Amanda, looking almost Spanish in a bandeau beneath a beautiful grey tilt hat.

But Miami's abstraction discouraged confidences.

"Why you so triste, chile? Dair no good, at all, in frettin'."

"Sh'o nuff."

"Dat death was on de cards my deah, an' dair is no mistakin' de fac ; an' as de shark is a rapid feeder it all ober sooner dan wid de crocodile, which is some consolation for dose dat remain to mourn."

"Sh'o, it bring not an attom to me!"

"'Cos de process ob de crocodile bein' sloweh dan dat ob de shark —"

"Ah, say no more," Miami moaned, throwing herself in a storm of grief across the bed. And as all efforts to soothe, made

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matters only worse, Mrs. Mouth prudently left her.

" Prancing Nigger, she seem dat sollumcholly an' depressed," Mrs. Mouth remarked at dinner, helping herself to some guava-jelly, that had partly dissolved through lack of ice.

" Since de disgrace ob Edna dat scarcely s'prisin'," Mr. Mouth made answer, easing a little napkin at his neck.

" She is her own woman me deah sah, an' *I* cannot prevent it! "

In the convivial ground-floor dining-room, " First-Greek-Empire " style, it was hard, at times, to endure such second-rate company, as that of a querulous husband.

Yes, marriage had its dull side, and its drawbacks, still, where would society be, (and where morality!) without the married women?

Mrs. Mouth fetched a sigh.

Just at her husband's back, above the ebony sideboard, hung a Biblical engraving after Rembrandt, *Woman Taken in Adultery,* the conception of which seemed to her exaggerated and overdone, knowing full

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well, from previous experience, that there need not, really, be much fuss. . . . Indeed, there need not be any: but to be *Taken* like that! A couple of idiots.

"Wen' I look at our chillens chairs, an' all ob dem empty, in my opinion, we both betteh deaded," Mr. Mouth brokenly said.

"I daresay dair are dose dat may t'ink so," Mrs. Mouth returned, refilling her glass, "but, Prancing Nigger, I am not like dat; no sah!"

"Where's Charlie?"

"I s'poge he choose to dine at de lil Cantonese restaurant on de quay," she murmured, setting down her glass with a slight grimace: how *ordinaire* this cheap red wine! Edna doubtless was sipping champagne! Respectability had its trials. . . .

"Dis jelly mo' like lemon squash," Mr. Mouth commented.

"'Cos dat lil liard Ibum, he again forget de ice! Howebber, I hope soon to get rid ob him: for de insolence ob his bombax is more dan I can stand," Mrs. Mouth declared, lifting her voice on account of a piano-organ in the street just outside.

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"I s'poge today Chuesd'y? It was a-Chuesd'y — God forgib dat po' frail chile."

"Prancing Nigger, I allow Edna some young yet for dat position; I allow dat to be de matteh ob de case but, me good sah! Bery likely she marry him later."

"Pah."

"An', why not?"

"Chooh, nebba!"

"Prancing Nigger, you seem to forget dat your elder daughter was a babe ob four, w'en I put on me nuptial arrange blastams to go to de Church."

"Sh'o, I wonder you care to talk ob it!"

"An', today, honey, as I sat in de Cathedral, lis'nin' to de Archbishop, I seemed to see Edna, an' she all in *dentelles* so *chic,* comin' up de aisle, followed by twelve maids, all ob good blood, holdin' flowehs an' wid hats kimpoged ob feddehs — worn raddeh to de side, and' I heah a stranger say: "Excuse me, sah, but who dis fine marriage?" an a voice make reply: "Why, dat Mr. Ruiz de milliona'r-'r-'r'," an' as he speak, one ob dese Italians from de Opera house, commence to sing, "De voice

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dat brieved o'er Eden," an' Edna she blow a kis at me an' laugh dat arch."

"Nebba!"

"Prancing Nigger, 'wait an' see'!" Mrs. Mouth waved prophetically her fan.

"No, nebba," he repeated, his head sunk low in chagrin.

"How you know, sah?" she queried, rising to throw a crust of loaf to the organ man outside.

The wind with the night had risen, and a cloud of blown dust was circling before the gate.

"See de rain drops, deah; here come at last de big rain."

". . . ."

"Prancing Nigger!"

"Ah'm thinkin'."

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XIV

IMPROVISING at the piano, Piltzenhoffer, kiddy-grand, he was contented, happy. The creative fertility, bursting from a radiant heart, more than ordinary surprised him: "My most quickening affair, since — " he groped, smiling a little at several particular wraiths, more, or less, bizarre, that, in their time, had especially disturbed him. Yes; probably!" he murmured, enigmatically, striking an intricate, virile chord.

"Forgib me dearest! I was wid de manicu' of de fingehnails."

"Divine one."

She stood before him.

Hovering there between self-importance, and madcapery, she was exquisite quite.

"All temperament . . . !" he murmured, capturing her deftly between his knees.

She was wearing a toilette of white *crêpe de chine,* and a large favour of bright purple Costa-Rica roses.

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"Soon as de sun drop, dey set out, deah: so de manicu' say."

"What shall we do till then?"

". . . or, de pistols!" she fluted, encircling an arm about his neck.

"Destructive kitten," he murmured, kissing, one by one her red, polished nails.

"Honey! Come on."

He frowned.

It seemed a treason almost to his late mistress, an exotic English girl, perpetually shivering, even in the sun, this revolver practice on the empty Quinine-bottles she had left behind. Poor Meraude. It was touching what faith she had had in a dose of quinine! Unquestionably she had been faithful to *that*. And, dull enough, too, it had made her. With her albums of photographs, nearly all of midshipmen, how insufferably had she bored him — : "This one, darling, tell me, isn't he — I, really — he makes me — and this one, darling! An Athenian viking, with hair like mimosa, and what ravishing hands! — oh my God! — I declare — he makes me — " Poor Meraude; she had been extravagant as well.

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"Come on, an' break some bokkles!"

"There's not a cartridge left," he told her, setting her on his knee.

"Ha-ha! Oh, hi-hi!
Not a light;
Not a bite!
What a Saturday Night!"

she trilled, taking off a comedian from the Eden Garden.

Like all other negresses she possessed a natural bent for mimicry, and a voice of that lisping quality that would find complete expression in songs such as: Have you seen my sweet garden ob Flowehs? Sst! Come closter, Listen heah, Lead me to the Altar Dearest, and His Little Pink, proud, Spitting-lips are Mine.

"What is that you're wearing?"

"A souvenir ob today; I buy it fo' Luck," she rippled, displaying a black briar cross pinned to her breast.

"I hope it's blessed?"

"De nun dat sold it, didn't say: Sh'o, it's dreadful to t'ink ob po' Mimi, an' she soon a pilgrim all in blistehs an' rags," she com-

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mented, as a page boy with bejasmined ears appeared at the door.

"Me excuse. . . ."

"How dare you come in lil saucebox, widdout knockin'?"

"Excuse, missey, but . . . "

"What?"

Ibum hung his head.

"I only thoughted, it bein' Crucifix day, I would like to follow in de procession thu de town."

"Bery well: but be back in time fo' dinner."

"T'ank you, missey."

"An' mind fo' once you are!"

"Yes, missey," the niggerling acquiesced, bestowing a slow smile on Snob and Snowball who had accompanied him into the room. Easy of habit, as tropical animals are apt to be, it was apparent that the aristocratic pomeranian was paying sentimental court to the skittish mouser, who, since her περιπέτεια of black kittens looked ready for anything.

"Sh'o, but she hab a way wid her!" Ibum remarked impressed.

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"Lil monster, take dem both, an' den get out ob my sight," his mistress directed him.

Fingering a battered volume, that bore the book-plate of Meraude, Vittorio appeared absorbed.

"Honey."

"Well?"

"Noddin'."

In the silence of the room, a restless bluebottle, attracted by the wicked leer of a chandalier, tied up incredibly in a bright green net, blended its hum with the awakening murmur of the streets.

"Po' Mimi. I hope she look up as she go by."

"Yes, by Jove."

"Doh after de rude t'ings she say to me — " she broke off, blinking a little at the sunlight through the thrilling shutters.

"If I remember, beloved, you were both equally candid," he remarked, wandering out upon the balcony.

It was on the palm grown Messalina, an avenue that comprised a solid portion of the Ruiz estate, that he had installed her, in a many-storied building, let out in offices and flats.

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Little gold, blue, lazy and romantic Cuna, what chastened mood broods over thy life today?

"Have you your crucifix? Won't you buy a cross?" persuasive, feminine voices rose up from the pavement below. Active again with the waning sun, "workers," with replenished wares, were emerging forth from their respective dépots nursing small lugubrious baskets.

"Have you bought your cross?" The demand, when softly cooed, by some solicitous patrician, almost compelled an answer; and most of the social world of Cuna appeared to be vending crosses, or "Pilgrims' medals" in imitation "bronze," this afternoon upon the curb. At the corner of Valdez Street, across the way, Countess Kattie Taosay, (*née* Soderini), austere in black with Parma violets, was presiding over a dépot festooned with nothing but rosaries, that "professed" themselves, as they hung, to the suave trade-wind.

"Not a light;
Not a bite!
What a——"

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Edna softly hummed, shading her eyes with a big feather fan.

It was an evening of cloudless radiance; sweet and mellow as is frequent as the close of summer.

"Oh, ki, honey! It so cleah, I can see de lil iluns ob yalleh sand, far away b'yond de Point."

"Dearest!" he inattentively murmured, recognising on the Avenue the elegant cob-web wheels of his mother's Bolivian buggy.

Accompanied by Eurydice Edwards, she was driving her favourite mules.

"An' de shipwreck off de coral reef, oh, ki!"

"Let me find you the long-glass dear," he said, glad for an instant to step inside.

Leaning with one foot thrust nimbly out through the balcony-rails towards the street, she gazed absorbed.

Delegates of agricultural guilds bearing banners, making for the Cathedral square (the pilgrims starting-point), were advancing along the avenue amidst applause: fruit-growers, rubber-growers, sugar-growers, opium growers all doubtless wish-

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ful of placating Nature that redoubtable Goddess, by shewing a little honour to the Church. "Oh Lord, *not* as Sodom," she murmured, deciphering a text attached to the windscreen of a luxurious automobile.

"Divine one, here they are."

"T'anks, honey, I see best widdout," she replied, following the Bacchic progress of two girls in soldier's forage-caps, who were exciting the gaiety of the throng.

"Be careful, kid; don't lean too far...."

"Oh, ki, if dey don't exchange kisses!"

But the appearance of the Cunan Constabulary, handsome youngsters, looking the apotheosis themselves of earthly lawlessness, in their feathered sun-hats and bouncing kilts, created a diversion.

"De way dey stare up; I goin' to put on a tiara!"

"Wait, do, till supper," he entreated, manipulating the long-glass to suit his eye.

Driving or on foot, were the usual faces.

Seated on a doorstep, Miss Maxine Bush, the famous actress, appeared to be rehearsing a smart society *rôle,* as she flapped the air with a sheet of street-fowl paper, while

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rattling a money-box, her tame monkey, "Jutland-ho," came as prompt for a coin as any demned Duchess.

"Ha-ha, Oh, hi-hi!" Edna's blasted catches: "Bless her," he exclaimed, re-levelling the glass. Perfect. Good lenses these; one could even read a physician's doorplate across the way: "Hours 2–4, Agony guaranteed" — obviously, a dentist, and the window-card too, above, "Miss — ? Miss — ? Miss — ? — *Speciality:* Men past thirty."

Four years to wait. Patience.

Ooof! There went "Alice" and one of her boys. Bad days for the ballet! People afraid of the Opera house . . . that chandalier . . . and the pictures on the roof. . . . And wasn't that little Lady Bird? Running at all the trousers: "*have* you your crucifix! . . . ? ?"

"Honey. . . ."

She had set a crown of moonstones on her head, and had moonstone bracelets on her arms.

"My queen."

"I hope Mimi look up at me!"

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" Vain one."

Over the glistering city the shadows were falling, staining the white-walled houses here and there as with some purple pigment.

" Accordin' to de lates' 'ticklers, de Procession follow de Paseo only as far as de fountain."

" Oh. . . ."

" Where it turn up thu Carmen street, into de Avenue Messalina."

Upon the metallic sheen of the evening sky, she sketched the itinerary, lightly with her fan.

And smiling down on her uplifted face, he asked himself whimsically how long he would love her. She had not the brains poor child of course to keep a man forever. Heigho. Life indeed was often hard. . . .

" Honey, here dey come! "

A growing murmur of distant voices, jointly singing, filled liturgically, the air, together as the warning salute, fired at sundown, from the fort heights, above the town, reverberated sadly.

" Oh, la, la," she laughed, following the

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wheeling flight of some birds that rose startled from the palms.

"The Angelus. . . ."

"Hark, honey: What is dat dey singin?"

A thousand ages in Thy sight
Are like an evening gone,
Short as the watch that ends the night
Before the rising sun.

Led by an old negress leaning on her hickory staff, the procession came.

Banners, banners, banners.

"I hope Mimi wave!"

Floating banners against the dusk. . . .

"Oh, honey! See dat lil pilgrim-boy?"

Time like an ever-rolling stream,
Bears all its sons away;
They fly forgotten, as a dream
Dies at the opening day.

"Mimi, Mimi!" She had flung the roses from her dress: "Look up, my deah, look up."

But her cry escaped unheard.

They fly forgotten, as ā dream
Dies——

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The echoing voices of those behind lingered a little.

"Edna."

She was crying.

"It noddin'; noddin', at all! But it plain she refuse to forgib me!"

"Never,"

"Perspirin', an' her skirt draggin', sh'o, she looked a fright."

He smiled: For indeed already the world was perceptibly moulding her. . . .

"Enuff to scare ebbery crow off de Savannah!"

"And wouldn't the Farmers bless her."

"Oh, honey!" Her glance embraced the long, lamp-lit avenue with suppressed delight.

"Well."

"Dair's á new dancer at de Apollo, tonight. Suppose we go?"

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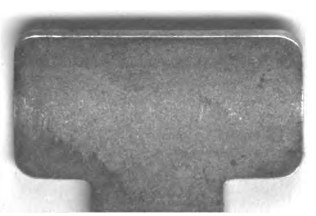

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